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# THE UPANISHADS

# THE UPANISHADS

*Katha, Iṣa, Kena, and Mundaka*

Translated from the Sanskrit with Introductions embodying a General Survey and the Metaphysics and Psychology of the Upanishads, and with Notes and Explanations based on the Commentary of Śrī Śaṅkarāchārya, the great ninth-century Philosopher and Saint of India

BY  
SWAMI NIKHILANANDA



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## PREFACE

THIS BOOK is a translation of four Upanishads: *Katha*, *Iśa*, *Kena*, and *Mundaka*. Written originally in melodious and inspiring Sanskrit verse, they set forth the reality of Brahman, the unsubstantiality of the phenomenal universe, and the ultimate oneness of the jiva, or individual soul, and Brahman, or the Supreme Soul. They also teach the unity of existence, the non-duality of the Godhead, and the harmony of religions.

The Upanishads have been translated by both Hindu and Occidental scholars. The works of the Hindu scholars often contain technical words and recondite statements that baffle the efforts of Western readers to understand the texts, while the Western scholars have generally interpreted the teachings by that historical and critical method which inevitably nullifies much of their spiritual warmth and significance. The inner experiences connoted by such transcendental terms as "God-head," "soul," and "spiritual freedom" cannot be adequately explained by historical research. Only teachers who have themselves attained to such experiences can bring out their meaning for the benefit of others.

Therefore to my literal translations of the texts I have added profuse notes and expositions from the commentaries of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya (A.D. 788-820), generally called Śaṅkara, who is one of the foremost Non-dualistic philosophers of India—a spiritual teacher of exalted mystical insight, as well as a man of great erudition, whose inspiring words have guided countless Hindus for over ten centuries in their search for Truth. His interpretations of the Upanishads are little known to the average Western reader interested in the sacred books of India. The incorporation of the relevant portions of these commentaries is one of the distinctive features of the present work.

The vast Vedic literature of the early Indo-Āryans is like a trackless tropical forest, full of lush underbrush, weeds, thorns, and stately trees. Travellers become dismayed, bewildered, lost; yet if they courageously and patiently push on, they are rewarded by the discovery of blossoms

of rare beauty and fragrance. One of the richest fields for such discoveries is the Upanishads. These philosophical treatises deal with a subject matter called *alaukika*—incomprehensible to the ordinary sense-organs and to the reasoning based upon their findings. Nevertheless, the teachings cannot be called dogmatic or exclusive; for anyone, irrespective of creed or social position, can prepare himself to understand them if he is willing to practise certain spiritual disciplines. The truths revealed are deeply mystical, and yet they belong to the universal experience of humanity. Without appropriate preparatory disciplines one cannot discover even the truths of the physical sciences.

No blind obedience to a teacher or book is demanded of the seeker of Vedic wisdom. Reasoning is encouraged, as far as it can lead; and then, with due respect, one takes leave of it. The final illumination comes from the depths of an immediate and direct experience. When, however, the Truth is transmitted and explained to others, the method of elucidation must not contradict reason. The teachers of the Upanishads have fathomed what can be fathomed, and they have bowed in reverence before the unfathomable. They do not argue; they only disclose as clearly as possible what they have seen. Hence the Sanskrit word for philosophy is *darśana*, which is derived from the root *drīś*, to see.

The Upanishadic teachings have been communicated, for the most part, through symbols that to modern people, especially in the West, appear naïve, fanciful, or even weird. One reason for this is that several thousand years have elapsed since they were first formulated; the pattern of human thought has immensely changed. Our mode of looking at life today is very different from that of our forbears; in like manner, what we today consider to be self-evident, simple, commonplace expressions will seem queer and obscure several thousand years from now. And yet, notwithstanding the archaic symbols, careful readers of the Upanishads will be struck by the keen power of observation of the Hindu philosophers and impressed by their empirical method of arriving at Truth. They experimented with the effects of ideas upon themselves, observed results, and arrived at conclusions, somewhat as the scientists of today experiment with facts. In short, the philosophy of the Upanishads is perennial, whatever may be the nature of its symbols, imagery, and illustrations. Moreover, its message of joy, strength, faith, and vision is as much needed today as it was when first proclaimed.

Paul Deussen wrote in his *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*:

"This identity of the Brahman and the ātman, of God and the soul, is the fundamental thought of the entire doctrine of the Upanishads. It is briefly expressed by the 'great saying' *tattvamasi*, 'that art thou'; and *aham brahmāsmi*, 'I am Brahman.' And in the compound word *Brahmātmaikyam* (*Brahma-ātmā-aikyam*), 'unity of the Brahman and the ātman,' is described the fundamental dogma of the Vedānta system.

"If we strip this thought of the various forms, figurative to the highest degree and not seldom extravagant, under which it appears in the Vedānta texts, and fix our attention upon it solely in its philosophical simplicity as the identity of God and the soul, the Brahman and the ātman, it will be found to possess a significance reaching far beyond the Upanishads, their time and country; nay, we claim for it an inestimable value for the whole race of mankind. We are unable to look into the future, we do not know what revelations and discoveries are in store for the restlessly inquiring human spirit; but one thing we may assert with confidence—whatever new and unwonted paths the philosophy of the future may strike out, this principle will remain permanently unshaken, and from it no deviation can possibly take place. If ever a general solution is reached of the great riddle, which presents itself to the philosopher in the nature of things all the more clearly the further our knowledge extends, the key can only be found where alone the secret of nature lies open to us from within, that is to say, in our innermost self. It was here that for the first time the original thinkers of the Upanishads, to their immortal honour, found it when they recognized our ātman, our inmost individual being, as the Brahman, the inmost being of universal nature and of all her phenomena."

I have written two chapters by way of introduction to this book. The first attempts to give a general survey of the Vedic literature and to show the place of the Upanishads therein. The second is devoted to a discussion of Brahman, or Ultimate Reality, in the Upanishads. Together, these chapters form a brief statement of the Upanishadic philosophy and psychology. The treatment of the subjects follows the traditional Hindu method. The ethics and the practical spiritual disciplines of the Upanishads will be discussed in a subsequent volume.

I do not claim any credit for originality in this book. Flowers have been gathered from many gardens. Or, to use a metaphor from India's immortal poet Kālidāsa: I have only passed a thread through gems pierced by the hard work of great scholars. I am indebted to *The Phi-*

*losophy of the Upanishads* by Paul Deussen and *Vedāntē Brahmatattva* by Hirendranath Dutta for some of the ideas in my introductory chapters, and especially for the references to the texts there used, while my quotations from the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* are taken from the scholarly translation of Swami Mādhavānanda. Swami Satprakāśhānanda has kindly read the manuscript and made many useful suggestions, and Mr. Joseph Campbell has been at great pains to revise the whole. To both these friends I am immensely grateful.

This book appears at one of the truly critical periods of our common human civilization. The ancient landmarks of history, politics, science, sociology, religion, and philosophy are disappearing one by one. The future is too vague for our limited vision. Pessimists are fearful of a return to the Dark Ages; optimists see in our present suffering and struggle the travail of a new birth; while thoughtful minds, undismayed by surface confusions and clashes, are searching for new knowledge to construct the future society. For the purely materialistic interpretation of man and the universe has been found as inadequate as the old sacramental interpretation given by the orthodox religions. Perhaps a *rapprochement* of the two is what is required.

Contact with the critical intellect of the modern West has been quickening to the scientific spirit of India, and perhaps, in return, India may give something to the West. Western scholars have been seeking for a new wisdom to spiritualize the conclusions of the physical sciences. The concepts derived from the ancient Greek, Semitic, and Egyptian traditions, which have hitherto inspired their modern humanistic civilization, seem unable to support the newest revelations of thought. Perhaps, at this critical juncture, the ancient spiritual lore of India, as embodied in the Upanishads and her other sacred books, may supply the needed metaphysical clue. If so, there might well be ushered in a great spiritual renaissance in the West, far more important than the earlier awakening that resulted from the contact, five hundred years ago, with the culture of the Hellenic world.

NIKHILANANDA

Thousand Island Park, N. Y.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Ai. Up.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Aitareya Upanishad</i>
<i>B. G.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Bhagavad Gitā</i>
<i>Bh.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Bhāgavatam</i>
<i>Br. Su.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Brahma Sutras</i>
<i>Br. Up.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad</i>
<i>Chh. Up.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Chhāndogya Upanishad</i>
<i>Is. Up.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Isa Upanishad</i>
<i>Ka. Up.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Katha Upanishad</i>
<i>Kai. Up.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Kaivalya Upanishad</i>
<i>Kau. Up.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Kaushitaki Upanishad</i>
<i>Ke. Up.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Kena Upanishad</i>
<i>Mā. Up.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Māndukya Upanishad</i>
<i>Mā. Up. Gau. Kā.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Māndukya Upanishad, Gauḍapāda Kārikā</i>
<i>Mai. Up.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Maitrāyani Upanishad</i>
<i>Mu. Up.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Mundaka Upanishad</i>
<i>Pr. Up.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Praśna Upanishad</i>
<i>Ri.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Rig-Veda</i>
<i>Śa. Br.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Śatapatha Brāhmana</i>
<i>Śvet. Up.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Śvetāśvatara Upanishad</i>
<i>Tai. Ār.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Taittiriya Āranyaka</i>
<i>Tai. Br.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Taittiriya Brāhmana</i>
<i>Tai. Up.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Taittiriya Upanishad</i>
<i>Vāj. Sam.</i>	.	.	.	<i>Vājasaneyi Samhitā</i>



## NOTE ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF SANSKRIT WORDS

a	has the sound of o in <i>come</i> .
ā	" " " " a in <i>far</i> .
e	" " " " e in <i>bed</i> .
i	" " " " ee in <i>feel</i> .
o	" " " " o in <i>note</i> .
u	" " " " u in <i>full</i> .
ai, ay	" " " " oy in <i>boy</i> .
au	" " " " o pronounced deep in the throat.
ch	" " " " ch in <i>church</i> .
ḍ	" " " " hard d in English.
g	" " " " g in <i>god</i> .
jñ	" " " " hard gy in English.
ś	" " " " sh in <i>shut</i> .

sh may be pronounced as in English.

t and d are soft as in French.

th has the sound of *t-h* in *boat-house*.

Other consonants appearing in the transliterations may be pronounced as in English.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THE VEDAS are the basic scriptures of the Hindus and their highest authority in all matters pertaining to religion and philosophy. They are, moreover, the earliest extant Indo-Āryan literary monuments. The Hindus regard them as eternal, without beginning, without human authorship. The primary meaning of the name Veda is Knowledge, super-sensuous wisdom. The secondary reference is to the *words* in which that Knowledge is embodied. And so the term Veda denotes not only the orthodox religious and philosophical wisdom of India, but also the books in which the earliest utterances of that wisdom are preserved. The Hindus look upon these books with the highest reverence. They are known as the Word-Brahman, the Śabda-Brahma.

Knowledge is of two kinds. The first is derived from the sense-organs and corroborated by various evidences based upon the experiences of the sense-organs. This is the form of knowledge that falls within the scope of the physical sciences. The second, however, is transcendent and is realized through the mental and spiritual discipline of yoga. This is the subject matter of the Vedas. According to Patanjali, the traditional master of the yoga doctrine, it is not the words of the Vedas that are eternal, but the Knowledge or ideas conveyed through them. This Knowledge, also called the Sphota, has existed always. At the conclusion of a cycle both the Sphota and the created universe merge in the undifferentiated causal state, and at the beginning of the new cycle the two together again become manifest. The Lord brings forth the universe with the help of the Knowledge of the Vedas. He Himself utters the words that express this Knowledge and confers upon them their appropriate meanings. That is to say, it is the Lord, the Creator of the universe, who has determined the precise meaning that is to be attached to every Vedic word. He is the first teacher of Vedic truth. Though the words may be different in different cycles, the ideas conveyed through them remain unalterable: no human intellect can interfere with them. According to Vedānta, the words of the Vedas come from the Lord spontaneously, like a man's breathing.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* commences with the statement that, in the beginning of the cycle, the Lord taught the Vedas through Brahmā, the first created being. According to the Purāṇas, Brahmā had been absorbed in meditation on the Supreme Lord, when, through the Lord's grace, there arose in his heart an indistinct sound. This was followed by the sound Om, the Sound-Brahman, which is the essence of the Vedic wisdom. Then this sacred syllable transformed itself into the various vowels and consonants of the alphabet. With their assistance Brahmā uttered words, and these are what became known to the world as the Vedas. He taught the Vedas to his disciples Marichi, Atri, Angirā, and others, and thus mankind came to possess the Vedic revelation.

The Vedas are called Śruti (from *śru*, to hear), since they were handed down orally from teacher to disciple. The Hindus did not at first commit them to writing. Either writing was unknown to them at that early period of history or they considered the words of the Vedas too sacred to set down. Written words become the common property of all, whereas the Vedas were to be studied only by those who had been initiated by a qualified teacher. Such was the high esteem in which the Hindus held the words that they did not make the slightest change even in the pronunciation while passing them on from generation to generation. Hence, though committed to writing only many centuries after their composition, the Vedas as we now possess them contain the exact words and ideas that were known to the most ancient Hindus.

### THE DIVISIONS OF THE VEDAS

The Vedas have been divided in various ways. The two most general divisions according to subject matter are known as the Karmakāṇḍa and Jñānakāṇḍa. The first deals with karma, ritualistic action, sacrifices, etc., the purpose of which is the attainment of material prosperity here on earth and felicity in heaven after death. The second is concerned with the Knowledge through which one is liberated from ignorance and enabled to realize the Highest Good.

In the Purāṇas it is stated that Vyāsa was commanded by Brahmā to make a compilation of the Vedas. Vyāsa is reputed to be the author of the *Mahābhārata*, of which the Bhagavad Gītā forms a part.<sup>1</sup> He

<sup>1</sup> The authorship of several Hindu scriptures is ascribed to Vyāsa. Either there was more than one Vyāsa, or other Indian writers, following a well-known custom by means of which importance was often given to books in ancient times, published or circulated their own works under the name of this great philosopher.

lived at the time of the battle of Kurukshetra. With the help of four disciples, so the tradition goes, this great saint and poet arranged the Vedas in four books, namely, the Rik, Yajur, Sāman, and Atharva. He was thus the classifier of the Vedas, though not their author. For many centuries before his time the Vedas had been known and their injunctions had formed the basis of all Hindu philosophic thought and all brāhminical ceremonial. But the texts had not existed in a systematic form. They had been revealed by the Lord to certain holy men of the remote past who had purified their minds by the practice of such spiritual disciplines as self-control and concentration—the great teachers known as the rishis, or seers of truth. The Vedas name both men and women among the rishis.

Vyāsa compiled the Rig-Veda by collecting the riks. Of the sāmāns he composed the Sāma-Veda, while the Yajur-Veda he composed of yajus. The Rig-Veda, which may be called a book of chants, is set to certain fixed melodies. The Sāma-Veda has no independent value; for it consists mostly of stanzas from the Rig-Veda. The arrangement of its verses is solely with reference to their place and use in the Soma-sacrifice. The Yajur-Veda contains, in addition to verses taken from the Rig-Veda, many original prose formulas which may be called sacrificial prayers.<sup>2</sup> The Atharva-Veda consists of a special class of Vedic texts known as chhandas. These deal with spells, incantations, and kingly duties, as well as exalted spiritual truths. Western scholars sometimes exclude this compilation from their consideration of the Vedas; but according to the Hindu view it definitely belongs among them. The name Trayi, or Triad, often used to denote the Vedas, is collectively applied to the Rig-Veda, the Sāma-Veda, and the Yajur-Veda, the Atharva-Veda being excluded from the Triad because it has no application to sacrificial actions. Nevertheless, one of the four priests officiating in all Vedic sacrifices had to be thoroughly versed in the chhandas.

Each of the four Vedas falls into two sections: Mantra and Brāhmana. The Mantra is also called the Samhitā (from *sam*, together, and *hita*, put), which means, literally, a collection of hymns, or mantras, used in the sacrifices. The offering of oblations for the propitiation of the devatās, or deities, is termed the sacrifice, or yajna. This was a highly important ceremony through which the ancient Indo-Āryans communed with the gods, or higher powers. The Mantra comprises the

<sup>2</sup> See S. N. Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 12. Cambridge, London 1932.

prayers and hymns, while the Brāhmana contains the rules and regulations for the sacrifices, deals with their accessories, and also reveals the meaning of the Mantra, which otherwise would remain obscure. Therefore both the Mantra and the Brāhmana were indispensable for the orthodox worship and propitiation of the gods.

A further development of the Brāhmana, and included therein, was the Āranyaka, the so-called "forest treatise." This was intended for those people who had retired into the forest in accordance with the ideal of the third stage of life, and were consequently unable to perform in the usual way the sacrifices obligatory for all twice-born householders.<sup>3</sup> The sacrifices required many articles and accessories impossible to procure in the forest. Hence the Āranyaka prescribes symbolic worship and describes various meditations that were to be used as substitutes for an actual sacrifice. To give an illustration from the first chapter of the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*: instead of actually performing the Vedic Horse-sacrifice (Aśvamedha), the forest-dweller was to meditate in a special way upon the dawn as the head of the horse, the sun as the eye, the air as the life, and so on. The worship was lifted from the physical to the mental level.

### THE FOUR STAGES

The full life-period of an Indo-Āryan was divided into four stages, namely, brahmacharya, gārhasthya, vānaprastha, and sannyaśa. The first stage was devoted to study. The celibate student led a life of chastity and austerity and served his teacher with humility. He learnt the Mantra and the Brāhmana sections of the Vedas. And when he left the teacher's house, after completing his studies, he was commanded not to deviate from truth and not to forget to persevere in the study of the Vedas. The second stage was devoted to household duties. The young man took a wife. Both together performed the Vedic sacrifice with the hymns of the Mantra and in accordance with the rules laid down in the Brāhmana. The third stage commenced when the hair turned grey and the face began to wrinkle. The householder consigned the responsibility of the home to his children and retired with his

<sup>3</sup> The members of the three upper castes in Hindu society—the brāhmins, the kshattriyas, and the vaiśyas—were called "dvija," twice-born. Their first birth refers to their coming out of their mother's womb; the second, which is a spiritual birth, to their initiation by a religious teacher, who invests them with the sacred thread, thus entitling them to study the Vedas and participate in the Vedic rituals.

wife into the forest. He was then known as a *vānaprashtha* or *āranyaka*, a forest-dweller. The *Āranyaka* portion of the Vedas prescribed for him sacrifice by meditation and symbolic worship.

The final stage, called *sannyāsa*, was the culmination of the strictly regulated life of an Indo-Āryan.<sup>4</sup> During this period, having totally renounced the world, he became a *sannyāsin*, or wandering monk, free from worldly desires and attachments and absorbed in the uninterrupted contemplation of Brahman. It was no longer necessary to worship God by means of material articles or even mental symbols. One experienced directly the non-duality of God, the soul, and the universe—Spirit communing immediately with the Spirit. The *sannyāsin* took the vow of dedicating his life to Truth and to the service of humanity, and was honoured as a spiritual leader of society. And it was for him that the Upanishads (which are mostly the concluding portions of the *Āranyakas*) were intended. The Upanishads are concerned with the direct experience of Brahman, which liberates one from the bondage of the relative world.

Thus the Indo-Āryan seers arranged the Vedas to conform to the four stages of life. The *brahmachāri* studied the *Samhitā*, the householder followed the injunctions of the *Brāhmana*, the forest-dweller practised contemplation according to the *Āranyaka*, and the *sannyāsin* was guided by the exalted wisdom of the Upanishads. According to the Hindu view, all four portions of the four Vedas were revealed simultaneously and have existed from the very beginning of the cycle. They are not to be regarded as exhibiting a philosophical development or evolution in the processes of thought.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> According to a Vedic injunction, one can renounce the world whenever one feels distaste for it. Thus one can become a *sannyāsin* from any stage. The normal course, however, is to proceed through the series of the four stages.

<sup>5</sup> Some Western scholars divide the Vedic age into four distinct periods. These are named the Chhandas period, the Mantra period, the *Brāhmana* period, and the Sutra period. According to this view, the mantras, or hymns, were composed during the Chhandas period and compiled during the Mantra period. During the first part of the *Brāhmana* period were composed the *Brāhmanas*, and during the second part, the *Āranyakas* and the Upanishads. During the Sutra period were written the well-known sutras, namely, the *Kalpa*, *Grihya*, *Śrauta*, and others. Then a decline began. There is some plausibility in this division into periods. Hindu scholars, however, challenge the categorical conclusion of Western scholars who claim that no Vedic literature but the *Samhitā* and *Brāhmana* existed before the Upanishads. The *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* (II. iv. 10.) states: "As from a fire kindled with wet faggots diverse kinds of smoke issue, even so, my dear, the *Rig-Veda*, *Yajur-Veda*,

It has already been stated that Vyāsa systematized the Vedas in four books. He taught the Rig-Veda to his disciple Paila, the Yajur-Veda to Vaiśampāyana, the Sāma-Veda to Jaimini, and the Atharva-Veda to Sumanta. Among the disciples of Vaiśampāyana was the celebrated Yājñavalkya, one of the great teachers of the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*. A legend states that this disciple became so vain of his knowledge that he incurred the displeasure of his guru and was expelled from the hermitage, with the command that he should leave what he knew of the Veda behind. The proud disciple spat out everything that he had learnt and went away. But some other disciples of the sage Vaiśampāyana were grieved at the sad plight of the Vedic lore and so, assuming the forms of partridges (tittira), they swallowed it, and later on taught that Vedic knowledge to their own disciples. Since then that portion of the Vedas has been known as the Black Yajur-Veda (Krishna Yajur-Veda) and also as the *Taittiriya Samhitā* (from tittira). Yājñavalkya, however, worshipped the sun god, who was so pleased with his devotion that he appeared before him in an equine form. The god committed to him the Vedic knowledge that later on became known as the White Yajur-Veda (Sukla Yajur-Veda) or the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* (from vāja, meaning energy, strength). This was the version of the Veda that Yājñavalkya taught to his disciples.

The four basic Vedas gradually branched off into many recensions, or śākhās, at the hands of various teachers, after whom they were named. Thus the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* of the White Yajur-Veda survives in the Kāṇva and Mādhyandina recensions, according to the two disciples of Yājñavalkya. They differ from each other greatly in content as well as in the number and arrangement of the sections and chapters, the former having seventeen and the latter fourteen sections. The concluding portion of the last book of both recensions is the

Sāma-Veda, Atharva-Veda, history, mythology, arts, Upanishads, verses, aphorisms (sūtras), elucidations, and explanations are like the breath of this Infinite Reality." In the *Chhândogya Upanishad* (VII. i. 2.) Nārada gives an account of various subjects studied by him prior to his coming to Sanatkumāra. They include—besides the Vedic texts—history, mythology, the lore of portents, logic, ethics, and various other sciences. Similar instances can be given from the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* and other scriptures. All this shows that the Vedic literature was extremely various even before the compilation of the Upanishads. It may be admitted, however, that during the four periods recognized by the Western scholars, the various designated portions of Vedic literature came in sequence to the fore.

*Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*; but here again the two versions often differ. Śaṅkarāchārya based his commentary on the Kāṇva recension.

Each of the Vedas contains its own Brāhmanas, which, as already stated, provide instructions regarding the procedures of sacrifice and also, through the Āraṇyakas, meditations and symbolic worship for the forest-dwellers. The *Aitareya* and *Kaushitaki Brāhmanas* belong, for example, to the Rig-Veda; the *Taittiriya* and *Maitrāyaṇi*, to the Black Yajur-Veda; the *Śatapatha*, to the White Yajur-Veda; the *Chhāndogya* and *Tāndya*, to the Sāma-Veda; and the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa*, to the Atharva-Veda.

In most cases the concluding portion of the Āraṇyaka is the Upanishad—also called the Vedānta because in it the Vedic wisdom reaches its culmination (*anta*). It shows the seeker the way to Liberation and the Highest Good. Usually there is a full series, from the Samhitā, or Mantra, through the Brāhmaṇa and Āraṇyaka to the culmination in the Upanishad. For example, the *Taittiriya Samhitā* is followed by the *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa*, at the end of which comes the *Taittiriya Āraṇyaka*; and this is concluded by the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. But in rare instances an Upanishad may come directly at the conclusion of the Samhitā, as is the case with the *Iśa Upanishad*. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* forms the last three chapters of the *Taittiriya Āraṇyaka*; the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*, the last six chapters of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*; the *Aitareya Upanishad*, the last five chapters of the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka*; and the *Kena Upanishad*, the ninth chapter of the *Talavakāra Brāhmaṇa* of the White Yajur-Veda.

## THE ANTIQUITY OF THE VEDAS

One hesitates to enter into a discussion of the time when the Vedas were collated. The compiler Vyāsa is reputed to have been alive at the time of the battle of Kurukshetra; but when was that battle fought? Some European Indologists assign the Vedas to the twelfth century B.C., others to earlier ages. Max Müller, for example, supposed the date to be about 1200 B.C., but Haug, about 2400. Neither believed, of course, in the divine origin of the hymns. Bāl Gangādhara Tilak, an eminent Indian scholar, calculated from astronomical data and suggested that the mantras of the Rig-Veda were brought together about five thousand years before the Christian era, while, according to the orthodox tradition, the texts, even before their compilation, had been



known to the rishis for unnumbered years. In short, the dates of the Vedic hymns and collections are far from clear.

One reason for the obscurity is that the ancient Hindus lacked the historical sense. They seldom kept records of the dates of their literary, religious, or even political achievements. The Vedas, furthermore, which had been handed down orally for so many centuries, were never believed by them to have had human authorship: they had either been taught to the sages by God or had become manifest of themselves to the primordial rishis, who were the seers of the mantras. Hence in India the tendency has always been to regard the Vedas as eternal, rather than as compositions of a certain historical moment. But even from the modern historical point of view it is not easy to determine the origin and trace the gradual development of the Vedic tradition. The Rig-Veda, which is generally recognized as the earliest of the four, contains lofty philosophical concepts, and sentiments of a monistic cast such as Western thinkers are inclined to assign to a later and highly developed stage of human thought. "The Reality is one," we read, for example, "but the sages call it by various names." Moreover, we find that a critical spirit has already developed. The ability of the gods—who themselves exist in time and space and are victims of causality—to create the universe is questioned. Such ideas indicate a maturity of philosophical insight and by no means the primitive infancy of thought.

Following their historical method, the European Indologists regard the Upanishads to be of later composition than the Mantras and Brāhmanas. They do not admit any of them to be earlier than the eleventh century B.C., while to many are assigned a much later date. In this respect the Hindu tradition, as we have seen, is totally different, the orthodox belief and teaching being that all parts of the Vedas were revealed at the same time, though the various collections might have been compiled in different periods.

## THE UPANISHADS

Now about the number and divisions of the Upanishads. With the disappearance of many of the recensions of the Vedas, many Brāhmanas, Āranyakas, and Upanishads also disappeared.<sup>6</sup> The fact that the sacred

<sup>6</sup> The Rig-Veda is said to have existed in twenty-one recensions, the Yajur-Veda in a hundred, the Sāma-Veda in a thousand, and the Atharva-Veda in nine. But there are differences of opinion among the authorities on this subject.

books were not committed to writing in ancient times is partly responsible for this lamentable loss. Furthermore, among the works surviving, it is difficult to ascertain the exact number that should be regarded as authentic Upanishads. A religious system is considered valid in India only when it is supported by Śruti (the Vedas); hence the founders of religious sects have sometimes written books and called them Upanishads in order to give their views scriptural authority. The *Āllāh Upanishad*, for instance, was composed in the sixteenth century, at the time of the Mussalmān emperor Ākbar.

One hundred and eight Upanishads are enumerated in the *Muktika Upanishad*, which is a work belonging to the tradition of the Yajur-Veda. Among these, the *Aitareya Upanishad* and *Kaushitaki Upanishad* belong to the Rig-Veda; the *Chhândogya* and *Kena*, to the Sāma-Veda; the *Taittiriya*, *Mahānārāyana*, *Katha*, *Śvetāśvatara*, and *Maitrāyani*, to the Black Yajur-Veda; the *Īśa* and *Bṛihadāranyaka*, to the White Yajur-Veda; and the *Mundaka*, *Praśna*, and *Māndukya*, to the Atharva-Veda. It may be stated, also, that these Upanishads belong to differing recensions of their respective Vedas. Thus, for instance, the *Mundaka Upanishad* belongs to the Śaunaka recension of the Atharva-Veda, while the *Praśna Upanishad* belongs to the Pippalāda recension. The *Brahma Sūtras*, which is the most authoritative work on the Vedānta philosophy, has been based upon the *Aitareya*, *Taittiriya*, *Chhândogya*, *Bṛihadāranyaka*, *Kaushitaki*, *Katha*, *Śvetāśvatara*, *Mundaka*, *Praśna*, and possibly also the *Jābāla Upanishad*. Śankarāchārya wrote his celebrated commentaries on the *Īśa*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Praśna*, *Mundaka*, *Māndukya*, *Aitareya*, *Taittiriya*, *Chhândogya*, *Bṛihadāranyaka*, and possibly also the *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad*. These are regarded as the major works.

The teachings of the Upanishads, the *Brahma Sūtras*, and the *Bhagavad Gītā* constitute Vedānta. Three main schools of Vedānta exist: the Dualist, Qualified Non-dualist, and Non-dualist, their principal teachers being, respectively, Madhvāchārya (A.D. 1199-1276), Rāmānujāchārya (A.D. 1017-1137), and Śankarāchārya (A.D. 788-820). Madhvāchārya has written commentaries on some of the major Upanishads according to Dualistic doctrines. Some of the disciples and followers of Rāmānujāchārya have done likewise to prove that Qualified Non-dualism is the underlying philosophy of Vedānta. But neither of these systems has won such wide acceptance and prestige as that of Śankarāchārya.

Sankarāchārya's interpretation of the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gitā, and *Brahma Sutras* is the supreme Hindu contribution to the philosophical wisdom of the world. This remarkable genius appeared at a critical period of Indian history. The sun of Buddhism had already passed below the horizon. Various invading peoples, such as the Śaks, the Tartars, the Beluchis, and the Huns had entered India with their grotesque religious ideas and ceremonies and embraced Buddhism. At their hands the religion of Buddha had become greatly distorted. A Hindu revival was struggling into existence, and numerous Hindu sects, such as the old Vedic ritualists and the yogi ascetics, were asserting their contrary yet equally dogmatic views. A veritable babel was reigning in India when the youthful Sankarāchārya appeared on the scene.

According to his followers this great pillar of Hinduism was the perfect embodiment of the Vedic wisdom. Endowed with a keen intellect and with rare forensic powers, he courageously challenged all opponents. He cut through the cobweb of conflicting views with a direct and consistently rational interpretation of the authoritative texts, supported by his own profound spiritual experiences. Within the short span of a lifetime of only thirty-two years, he travelled the length and breadth of India, preaching his doctrines and reforming the sannyāsin organizations. He founded four monasteries at the cardinal points of the country. And meanwhile he produced a body of literary work that includes not only his great Vedāntic commentaries but also many hymns addressed to the Hindu deities, through worship of whom the aspirant's heart is purified and his spirit qualified for the Knowledge of Brahman. When one considers the lofty height reached by Sankarāchārya in his philosophy, and at the same time the soul-melting love permeating his hymns, one cannot but marvel at the mighty sweep of his mind, the catholicity of his heart, and the austere purity of his intellect. He was indeed a saviour of the Hindu world.

The subject matter of the Upanishads is abstruse. Unwary students easily become confused by their apparent contradictions. Therefore, from ancient times, books have been composed to explain and harmonize their mysteries. Among these the Bhagavad Gitā and the *Brahma Sutras* are the best known. The Gitā is compared to the life-giving milk of the great milch cow, which is the Upanishads; Arjuna is the calf, and Sri Krishna the milker. Sri Krishna, in His dialogue with Arjuna, presented through the Bhagavad Gitā the essence of the

Upanishads. The *Brahma Sutras* (also known as the *Vedānta Sutras* and *Śārīraka Sutras*) formulates the teachings of the Upanishads in concise aphorisms which reconcile the many apparent contradictions. Vyāsa is the reputed author of these basic works. They, together with the Upanishads, constitute what are called the three Prasthānas, the canonical books, which form the foundation of the religion and philosophy of Vedānta.

Side by side with Śruti, or the Vedas, there exists another body of scriptural treatises known as Smṛiti. These works are regarded as having come into existence through human authorship. They derive their authority from the Vedas and include such majestic books as the *Mahābhārata*, the various Purāṇas, and the *Manusamhitā*. In ancient India only those people who belonged to the three upper castes were permitted to read the Vedas. The teachings of Smṛiti, however, were accessible to all. And they too opened the door to Liberation.

In A.D. 1650, fifty Upanishads were translated into Persian under the patronage of Prince Dārā, the son of Šājāhān, Emperor of Delhi. From the Persian they were translated into Latin, in A.D. 1801-1802. Schopenhauer read and studied this Latin translation and, in later years, declared: "In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life; it will be the solace of my death."

### THE MEANING OF UPANISHAD

The word Upanishad has been derived from the root *sad*, to which are added two prefixes: *upa* and *ni*. The prefix *upa* denotes nearness, and *ni*, totality. The root *sad* means to loosen, to attain, and to annihilate. Thus the etymological meaning of the word is the Knowledge, or Vidyā, which, when received from a competent teacher, *loosens totally* the bondage of the world, or surely enables the pupil to *attain* (i.e. realize) the Self, or *completely destroys* ignorance, which is responsible for the deluding appearance of the Infinite Self as the finite embodied creature. Though the word primarily signifies knowledge, yet by implication it also refers to the book that contains that knowledge. The root *sad* with the prefix *upa* also connotes the humility with which the pupil should approach the teacher.

The profound Knowledge of Brahman has been described in the Bhagavad Gītā as the "sovereign science."<sup>7</sup> It was considered a profound

secret and sometimes given the name of Upanishad.<sup>8</sup> It is to be noted that the instructions regarding Brahman were often given in short formulas also known as Upanishads. "Its secret name (Upanishad) is *Satyasya Satyam*, 'the Truth of truth.'"<sup>9</sup> "Now, therefore, the instruction [about Brahman]: *Neti, neti*—'Not this, not this.'"<sup>10</sup> "That Brahman is called *Tadvana*, the Adorable of all; It should be worshipped by the name of *Tadvana*."<sup>11</sup> The books which contained the above-mentioned secret teachings and formulas were also called Upanishads.

### QUALIFICATIONS OF STUDENTS

The later Vedānta teachers formulated the qualifications of the pupil entitled to study Vedānta. He must know, in a general way, the Vedas and their auxiliaries; must have attained purity of heart by freeing himself from sin, through an avoidance of selfish and forbidden actions as well as by the practice of daily devotions and obligatory duties, particular religious observances on special occasions, and the customary penances prescribed by religion. Further, he must discriminate between the Real and the unreal, and renounce the unreal. He must cultivate inner calmness and control of the senses, preserve the serenity of the mind and organs after they have been controlled, acquire such virtues as forbearance and concentration, and lastly, be possessed of an intense yearning for liberation from the bondages of worldly life. Such a one, and such a one alone, is qualified to receive from the teacher the profound knowledge of the Upanishads.

"This highest mystery of Vedānta, delivered in a previous cycle," we read, "should not be given to one whose passions have not been completely subdued, nor to one who is not a son or is not a pupil."<sup>12</sup> "A father may therefore tell that doctrine of Brahman to his eldest son or to a worthy pupil. But it should not be imparted to anybody else, even if he give the teacher the whole sea-girt earth full of treasure, for this doctrine is worth more than that. Yea, it is worth more."<sup>13</sup> "One must not teach this to any but a son or a pupil."<sup>14</sup>

The custodians of the Vedic culture were the members of the

<sup>8</sup> *Chh. Up.* I. i. 10; I. xiii. 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Br. Up.* II. i. 20.

<sup>10</sup> *Br. Up.* II. iii. 6.

<sup>11</sup> *Ke. Up.* IV. 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Śvet. Up.* VI. 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Chh. Up.* III. xi. 5-6.

<sup>14</sup> *Br. Up.* VI. iii. 12.

brāhmin caste. That is why the brāhmins were held in the highest esteem by every section of Hindu society.

### TESTS BY TEACHERS

Aspirants desiring the knowledge of the Upanishads were subjected to severe ordeals by their preceptors. The *Katha Upanishad* describes the case of Nachiketā, who was tested in various ways by Yama, the god of death, to ascertain his fitness for the Knowledge of Brahman. He was offered horses, elephants, and cattle; children and grandchildren; rulership of the earth and many years of life; heavenly damsels and their music; and numerous other desirable things which do not fall to the lot of an ordinary mortal. But he spurned them all, understanding their transitory nature, and persisted in his prayer for the Knowledge of the Self. Pratardana was tested by Indra,<sup>15</sup> Jānaśruti Pautrāyana by Raikva,<sup>16</sup> Āruni by Pravāhana,<sup>17</sup> Janaka by Yājñavalkya,<sup>18</sup> and Brihadratha by Śākāyana.<sup>19</sup>

In the *Praśna Upanishad*<sup>20</sup> the teacher Pippalāda demanded of his six disciples that they should spend one year practising austerities, continence, and faith. "Afterwards you may ask me any question you like; if I know the answer I shall give it to you." The *Chhāndogya Upanishad*,<sup>21</sup> in a celebrated passage, tells how the teacher Prajāpati required Indra and Virochana to practise spiritual disciplines for thirty-two years. Even after that, Virochana, the king of the demons, who had not acquired the necessary purity of heart, went away satisfied with the erroneous idea that the Self was identical with the body, while Indra, the king of the gods, had to continue in the austere life of a brahmachāri for another seventy-three years (one hundred and five in all) before he could realize the true knowledge of the Self.

### RECONCILING THE TEACHINGS OF THE UPANISHADS

One finds in the Upanishads various strands of thought: Dualism, Qualified Non-dualism, and Non-dualism. Further, the Upanishads describe both the Brahman with attributes (Saguna Brahman) and the attributeless Brahman (Nirguna Brahman). They also deal with

<sup>15</sup> *Kau. Up.* III. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Chh. Up.* IV. i.

<sup>17</sup> *Br. Up.* VI. ii. 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Mat. Up.* I. 2.

<sup>20</sup> I. 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> VIII. vii. 3; VIII. xi. 3.

the disciplines of philosophical knowledge (jñāna), divine love (bhakti), action (karma), and yoga. Sometimes contradictions appear. Hence the question arises as to whether the Upanishads present a single, consistent, coordinated system of knowledge or a mere conglomeration of unrelated ideas. The orthodox Hindu view is that the Upanishads are consistent, that they describe a single truth, namely, the reality of the non-dual Brahman, and furthermore, that this same truth is rendered in the Bhagavad Gītā and the *Brahma Sūtras*. The Vedāntic philosophers support this conclusion by certain accepted means of proof.

But the Western critics maintain that the Upanishads present inconsistent views and that conflicting doctrines may be found even in the same Upanishad. Such a conclusion, according to the Hindu philosophers, is the natural result of the inability of the Western Orientalists to find the thread of harmony. They place their emphasis on particular details and lack comprehension of the general trend. The subject matter of the Upanishads is Brahman, the Absolute, which transcends time, space, and causality and cannot be comprehended by human thought or rendered in words. Human language and reasoning can describe and interpret sense-perceived phenomena; but Brahman is beyond their grasp. Any presentation of this subject in finite and relative human terms cannot but contain seeming contradictions. Nevertheless, this does not vitiate the Absolute Itself. Further, the Hindu philosophers admit different degrees of power of comprehension on the part of various pupils and they formulate their instructions accordingly. But such differences do not affect Brahman Itself, which is the final object of Upanishadic knowledge.

According to Śaṅkarācārya, the sole purpose of the Upanishads is to prove the reality of Brahman and the phenomenality or unreality of the universe of names and forms, and to establish the absolute oneness of the embodied soul and Brahman. This Vedic truth is not a product of the human mind and cannot be comprehended by the unaided human intellect. Only a competent teacher, through direct experience, can reveal to the qualified student the true significance of the Vedas and the fullness of their absolutely consistent truth.

### THE KSHATTRIYA INFLUENCE

A striking feature of the Upanishads is the part played in them by the kshatriyas, the members of the royal military caste. This fact has

given rise to certain interesting speculations. The Mantra and Brāhmaṇa portions of the Vedas treat of sacrifices in which the brāhmins serve as priests. They deal with ritualistic works, in which a diversity of the actor, the instruments of action, and the result is recognized, while the sacrifices themselves are performed with a view to reaping results either here on earth or in the afterworld. This multiplicity of elements and ends stands in contrast to the central theme of the Upanishads, which is Brahma-vidyā, the unitive knowledge of Brahman and the oneness of existence, and to the Vedāntic condemnation of sacrifices as barriers to this unitive knowledge. The seeker for the Knowledge of Brahman is told in the Upanishads that he must renounce all actions calculated to bring fruits and eschew all desire for happiness either on earth or in heaven. Therefore several Western writers have contended that the Upanishads represent a protest of the kshatriyas against the influence of the brāhmins.<sup>22</sup> They contend also that the Knowledge of Ātman, whatever its origin, was cultivated primarily by the kshatriyas and accepted by the brāhmins only later on. Hindu scholars, however, do not accept this view.

In reviewing the problem, let us first point out a few of the references to kshatriyas in the Upanishads.

One of the most important and ancient of the Upanishads now extant is the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka*, which frequently mentions an emperor of Videha whose name was Janaka. This imposing figure is described as a master of the Vedic knowledge (adhita-veda), endowed with a keen intellect (medhāvi), and familiar with the doctrines of the Upanishads. It is stated in the third chapter that on a certain occasion this great emperor "performed a sacrifice in which gifts were freely distributed. Vedic scholars from the Kuru and Panchāla countries were assembled." The emperor then expressed a desire to know which was "the most erudite of these Vedic scholars." And so he had a thousand cows confined in a pen, and on the horns of each cow were fixed ten pādas of gold.

Janaka said to the brāhmins: "Revered brāhmins, let him who is the best Vedic scholar among you drive home the cows." None of the brāhmins dared to accept the challenge except the sage Yājñavalkya, who asked one of his pupils to lead the cows home. This enraged the

<sup>22</sup> P. Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p. 19. Clark, Edinburgh, 1908.



others. The chief priest of the court arose and said: "Are you, then, the best Vedic scholar among us?"

Yājñavalkya answered: "I bow to the best Vedic scholar. I only want the cows."

Thereupon the other brāhmins were determined to test his knowledge of Brahman. A learned debate ensued, and this was presided over by the kshattriya king.

In chapter four of the same work Yājñavalkya and the emperor Janaka again appear. This time the kshattriya is the disciple and the brāhmin the preceptor. Janaka receives from Yājñavalkya the supreme Knowledge of Brahman and demonstrates his appreciation by making a suitable gift: "I give you, sir, the empire of Videha, and myself with it, to wait upon you."

At the conclusion of the fifth chapter, this wise emperor Janaka instructs Buḍila, the son of Aśvatarāśva, concerning the Gāyatri, a verse the knowledge of which consumes a man's sins and makes him "pure, cleansed, undecaying, and immortal."

Pravāhana Jaivali, another kshattriya king, appears in the eighth section of the first chapter of the *Chhândogya Upanishad*, where he is described as teaching the secret of the Udgitha, discussed in the Sāma-Veda. He appears again in the third section of the fifth chapter of the same Upanishad, where he plays a more important role. In this case, the sage Āruni's son, Śvetaketu, is having an interview with the king, and the king asks him if he has been instructed by his father. The youth replies that he has received instruction; whereupon Jaivali confounds him by asking a number of questions regarding a man's departure from this world, his return, the Way of the Gods, the Way of the Fathers, and the rebirth of the soul. When Śvetaketu confesses that he does not know the answers, the king inquires: "Then why did you say that you had been instructed? How could anybody who did not know these things say that he had been instructed?" Śvetaketu returned to his father sorrowfully and described to him what had taken place.

Then Āruni went to the king, who said to him: "Sir, ask as a boon such things as men possess." The brāhmin said to him: "May such things as men possess remain with you! Repeat to me those words which you addressed to my boy." The king was disturbed. He said to Āruni: "Remain with me for some time." Then he added: "As to what you have just asked of me, sir, this knowledge has not gone to any brāhmin before you. That is why, in ancient times, all over the world, the

kshattriyas were the sole instructors in this knowledge." Finally the king gave instruction to his brāhmin disciple in what is known as the "knowledge of the Five Fires," which deals with the soul's rebirth following death. This had hitherto been a secret confined to the kshattriyas. He who acquired this knowledge, said the king, was not defiled by association with vile persons; he remained pure and clean and would gain the world of the blessed.

Section two of the sixth chapter of the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* also tells of the teaching of the knowledge of the Five Fires by Prāvāhana Jaivali to Āruni, and in the *Kaushitaki Upanishad*, chapter one, we read that the kshattriya king Chitra, belonging to the line of Gārga, imparted the same knowledge to the same brāhmin sage.

Let us now return to the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*. In chapter two, section one, the kshattriya king of Benares, Ajātaśatru, was approached by the proud brāhmin Bālāki, who said: "I will tell you about Brahman." The king begged him to go on. Bālāki described the attributes of Brahman as reflected in such objects as the sun, the moon, lightning, ākāśa, the wind, fire, water, and a mirror.

"Is this all?" Ajātaśatru asked.

"This is all."

"By knowing this much one cannot know Brahman," said the king.

The brāhmin was humbled. "I approach you as a student," he said.

"It is contrary to usage," said the king, "that a brāhmin should approach a kshattriya with the thought that the latter might teach him about Brahman. However, I shall instruct you." Then the kshattriya Ajātaśatru taught the brāhmin Bālāki the oneness of jiva and Brahman by explaining the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep.

This story is repeated in the *Kaushitaki Upanishad*, chapter four.

In the *Chhāndogya Upanishad*, fifth chapter, section eleven, the story is told of five great brāhmin householders, all well versed in the Vedas, and another erudite brāhmin, Āruni, who came to the kshattriya king Kaikeyi Aśvapati for the knowledge of Vaiśvānara Ātman (the Universal Self). When they arrived, the king showed respect to them separately, and next morning said to his honoured guests: "In my kingdom there is no thief, no miser, no drunkard, no brāhmin without a sacrificial altar in his house, no ignorant person, and no adulterer—not to speak of adulteress. Sirs, I am about to perform a sacrifice. Please remain with me, and I shall bestow on each of you as much wealth as I should give to a priest." They answered: "A man should

state the purpose for which he has come. At the present time, you are the one who possesses the knowledge of the Vaiśvānara Ātman. Please give us instruction." "Tomorrow," said the king, "I shall give you my reply." Next morning the brāhmins approached him, like disciples, carrying fuel in their hands, and received the instruction for which they had come.

One more illustration. It is told in the seventh chapter of the *Chhāndogya Upanishad* that Nārada once came to the kshattriya Sanatkumāra and humbly begged him for instruction. Sanatkumāra said: "Please tell me what you know; after that I shall tell you what is beyond." The learned Nārada enumerated the subjects that he had studied. These included, among others, the Vedas, mythology, grammar, the science of numbers, the rules of sacrifice for the ancestors, the science of portents, logic, ethics, etymology, the science of pronunciation and prosody, the science of demons, the science of weapons, astronomy, the science of serpents, and the sciences of perfume-making, dancing, and singing. "But sir, for all of this," concluded Nārada, "I know only the mantras, the sacred words, and not the Self. I have been told by such men as yourself that he who knows the Self overcomes grief; I am in grief. Good sir, assist me beyond this grief." Thereupon Sanatkumāra began to lead Nārada, step by step, to the Knowledge of Brahman. Sanatkumāra said: "Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else—that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else—that is the finite. The Infinite is immortal; the finite, mortal."<sup>23</sup> "The Infinite," continued the king, "is, indeed, below, above, behind, before, to the right, and to the left. It is, indeed, all this."<sup>24</sup> Thus it was that the venerable Sanatkumāra revealed to Nārada, when the impurities of his heart had been removed, "that which lies beyond darkness."<sup>25</sup>

It is apparent from all of this (and this is not by any means an exhaustive list of the possible citations) that the kshattriyas exerted a profound influence on the teachings and teachers of the Upanishads. They were versed in rituals, in the mysteries of rebirth, in the identity of jiva and Brahman, and in the Knowledge of the Infinite, which is the culmination of the spiritual wisdom of the Indo-Āryans. This, as we have said, has led certain eminent Vedic scholars of the West to con-

<sup>23</sup> VII. xxiv. 1.

<sup>24</sup> VII. xxv. 1.

<sup>25</sup> VII. xxvi. 2.

clude that the Upanishads, containing the Knowledge of the Self, must be a later development by the kshatriyas in reaction against the rituals and sacrifices of the Mantra and Brāhmana portions of the Vedas: the brāhmins, occupied solely with the details and paraphernalia of sacrifice, were ignorant of the philosophy of the Self and so had to learn Self-Knowledge from the teachers of the military caste.

Such a conclusion, however, is hardly valid. It is true, indeed, that, according to Advaita Vedānta, the Knowledge of Brahman and the performance of sacrifices cannot coexist. They are incompatible. He who has realized the oneness of jiva and Brahman and the unreality of the relative world cannot participate in Vedic sacrifices, the aim of which is to enable the performer to enjoy happiness in heaven. However—and this is the great point—sacrifices and the Knowledge of Brahman are meant for *two different classes of aspirants*. A sannyāsin, who has experienced the transitory nature of enjoyment, is qualified for Self-Knowledge; but such enlightened ones do not constitute the major portion of society. It is the duty of others, who belong to the first three stages of life and who identify themselves with the body and mind and seek material happiness, to engage in sacrificial action. This is a basic principle, understood and taken for granted by every member of Hindu society. It is neither necessary nor possible for a sannyāsin to perform sacrifices. To suppose that there were among the brāhmins no sannyāsins who were endowed with Self-Knowledge would be wrong. The fact is that as there were both illumined and unillumined persons among the kshatriyas, so there were among the brāhmins those who were devoted to sacrifices and also those who cultivated the Knowledge of Brahman. The passages of the Upanishads that condemn sacrifices and other actions cannot possibly apply to the performers of sacrifices; for they are still householders. Such passages were directed to, and can apply to, sannyāsins alone.

As already stated, according to the Vedic tradition, the Lord alone is the source of Vedic knowledge. He is, indeed, the embodiment of that knowledge. At the beginning of a cycle He reveals it for the protection of creation, making it known through the pure hearts of the rishis. Rishis, according to the Vedas, are highly spiritual beings who attained perfection in previous cycles but have assumed human bodies in the new creation to become divine instruments for the propagation of the wisdom of the Vedas. Kapila, Vyāsa, and Vāśishtha belong to this number. Then, as time goes on, the Vedic knowledge is dissem-

inated through a succession of competent teachers. The *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* supplies several genealogical tables of such Vedic seers.<sup>26</sup> There were a number of kshatriyas among the rishis, and the brāhmins, eager to acquire their knowledge, accepted discipleship under them, in accordance with the well-known Hindu maxim that a superior knowledge should be learnt even from a person of inferior rank.

### THE VEDIC KNOWLEDGE

The knowledge that was prized most in ancient India by the rishis was known as Vidyā. As a result of this Vidyā, or Knowledge of Reality, one attains Bliss and Immortality. It is quite different from ordinary knowledge, which is the product of the intellect. Vidyā is a supersensuous and supramental experience.

According to the *Mundaka Upanishad*, one should acquire two forms of knowledge: the aparā (lower) and the Parā (Higher). The lower consists of the four Vedas (that is to say, their ritualistic portions) and their six auxiliaries. It deals with the phenomenal universe. The importance of the lower knowledge was admitted by the rishis. It is conducive to a man's material welfare; but its results are impermanent.

The Higher Knowledge is that by which the Imperishable Substance is known. This Imperishable Substance was given the name of Brahman by the Indo-Āryan seers; hence the Higher Knowledge was also called Brahmanvidyā, the Knowledge of Brahman; and this is the knowledge to which was given the general name Upanishad. Brahmanvidyā was regarded as the foundation of all other forms of knowledge—*sarva-vidyāpratishthā*. Highly treasured by the rishis, it was zealously guarded by them; for they regarded it as more precious than the earth filled with riches. The secret of Brahman could be transmitted only to a qualified disciple. "He who meets with a teacher to instruct him obtains the true knowledge."<sup>27</sup> "Only the knowledge that is learnt from a teacher leads to the Highest Good."<sup>28</sup> The qualifications of the aspirant have already been described. "If these truths have been told to a high-souled person who feels supreme devotion for God, and for his guru as for God, then they will shine forth—then they will shine forth indeed."<sup>29</sup>

The actual experience of Brahman, which is the culmination of the

<sup>26</sup> *Br. Up.* II. vi; IV. vi; VI. v.

<sup>27</sup> *Chh. Up.* VI. xiv. 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Chh. Up.* IV. ix. 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Śvet. Up.* VI. 23.

Higher Knowledge, requires extremely austere disciplines. Only the great renouncers known as paramahamsas, belonging to the highest order of sannyāsins, can gain this complete Knowledge of Brahman. For Brahman cannot be perceived or comprehended by the senses or by the intellect that depends on them. Only yoga can give a man that subtle depth of understanding by which the supramental truths can be apprehended. The rishis were adept in yoga. That is why their hearts were open to the secrets of creation and the universe.

The methods of the modern physical sciences for the discovery of truth are based upon a different notion of how to search than that which directed the rishis in their realization of Brahman. A scientist seeks to understand the universe through reason based on the knowledge derived from the sense-organs. But the powers of the senses are limited. Therefore he utilizes the aid of various instruments. With the help of the telescope he brings a very distant object within the range of his vision; with the help of the microscope he immensely magnifies a minute object. Similarly other instruments come to the scientist's assistance. The technicians of science are busy, day and night, inventing new instruments by means of which to strengthen and intensify the powers of the senses.

But there exist minute things in the world that cannot be detected even by the most powerful electronic microscope. And the universe is so vast and widespread that its remotest objects would not come within a man's ken even if the largest telescope known to us were to be magnified a million times and directed toward them. The final secrets of the universe will for ever remain unrevealed to physical scientists; for intellect, aided by the senses, is the only means employed by them in their quest for understanding.

The rishis, on the other hand, did not entirely depend upon reason, as this word is usually understood. They developed another faculty of understanding, which is called *bodhi*, or deeper consciousness. The seeker of *Brahmavidyā* wakened the subtle power of the mind and senses by means of concentration and self-control. By withdrawing the senses from outer objects, he made the scattered mind one-pointed. This practice of concentration presently endowed it with keenness, depth, and a new intensity, and as the power of concentration increased, the seeker became aware of deeper phases of existence. Instinct, reason, and intuition, or higher consciousness—the three instruments of knowledge—all are differing states of the same mind. Hence a lower state can

be developed into a higher. The means to this end, however, are not external instruments but appropriate disciplines directed within.

The Vedic teacher prepared the soil of his disciple's mind before giving him any instruction regarding Brahman. Moreover, there were occasions when the instruction given was not oral. An ancient Sanskrit text says: "The teacher explains in silence and the disciple's doubts are resolved." When a pupil approached the preceptor for instruction, often he would be asked to meditate on the problem and seek the answer from within his own self. And so we read in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*<sup>30</sup> that Bhrigu came to his father Varuna and asked: "Revered sir, teach me Brahman." Varuna did not give him a direct reply; he asked the boy to practise meditation and austerities. Bhrigu followed this advice and came to the conclusion that food alone was Brahman. He was asked to meditate again. This time he realized that prāṇa alone was Brahman. His father exhorted him to concentrate further. At last the nature of Brahman was revealed in Bhrigu's heart and he realized that Brahman is Ānandam, Bliss Absolute.<sup>31</sup>

The Upanishads teach the truth—unknown to the sense-organs—regarding living beings (jivas), the universe (jagat), and God (Īśvara). They describe the nature and attributes of Brahman, Its reality and manifestations, Its powers and aspects. They also describe the creation, preservation, and ultimate dissolution of the universe, and the changes and modifications of nature (prakṛiti). Furthermore, the Upanishads deal with the development of the individual soul (jiva), its evolution and its destiny, its bondage and its freedom. The relationship between matter and Spirit, between God, the universe, and living beings, also belongs to the subject matter of the Upanishads. These concerns relate to a supersensuous realm unknowable to a man's everyday state of consciousness. Yet the weal and woe and the good and evil of a man depend, in a special manner, upon his knowledge of these things. For man is rooted in a reality far deeper than is apparent to the senses. Just as only a small portion of an iceberg is visible, so only a small portion of man is available to the senses, no matter how they may be magnified. The solution of many of our most vital problems must come, therefore, from regions beyond the scope of the ordinary faculty of reason.

Is there a soul apart from the body? What happens to the soul after the death of the body? If a soul survives the destruction of the body,

<sup>30</sup> III. i.

<sup>31</sup> *Tat. Up.* III. vi.

does it ever return to earth? Is a man responsible for his good and bad action? What is the goal and purpose of human life?

Our conduct and work depend upon our answers to these questions. And yet we cannot answer them intelligently with an intellect aided only by the senses.

Or again: Does God exist? Is God just and compassionate? Or is He unconcerned about man, regarding him with indifferent eyes? Is God endowed with a form or is He formless? Has He attributes or is He attributeless? Is He immanent in the universe or is He transcendent? Or is He both? Is the universe real or unreal? Does it exist outside man's mind or is it a figment of his imagination? Is the universe beginningless or has it a beginning? Has the Godhead become the universe or has He made it, like a watch, or is the universe a mere appearance superimposed upon the Godhead through an inscrutable illusion of some kind, like a mirage upon a desert? And if the universe is not unreal, is it finite or infinite?

An inquiring mind longs to find satisfactory answers to these philosophical questions; but there is no human means to satisfy such a longing. Only the Knowledge of Brahman can break the "fetters of the heart" and solve all doubts. This is the Hindu view. That is why the Lord Himself promulgated this Knowledge in the world through the rishis. The more a man's intelligence deepens, the more his heart is made pure and his mental horizon widens, the more will he understand and appreciate their teachings, as preserved in the Vedas and Upanishads.

One can hardly exaggerate the influence of the Vedas upon the individual and collective life of the Hindus. Since the days of their greatness, both the political and the religious life of India have undergone tremendous changes. Many aggressive races have entered the country from outside and been absorbed in this melting-pot; other powerful cultures have retained their individual traits, like the ingredients in a huge salad-bowl. Foreign conquerors have sought, by various means, to impose their customs and ideals upon Hindu society. Nevertheless, through all these vicissitudes, the Hindu world as a whole has retained its loyalty to the Vedas and still recognizes them as the highest authority in religious matters.

The outer forms of the Hindu religion have certainly changed. Modern Hindus do not perform sacrifices like their ancestors. The worship in the temples has been influenced by the Smritis and the Purāṇas.



Tantra has also left its impression upon the worship in many parts of the country. Yet underlying all of this there are certain fundamental truths, taught in the Upanishads, to which the Hindus have always adhered. It is this flexibility of the Hindu mind in adapting itself to the demands of changing circumstances, while remaining true to the immutable ideals of religion, that accounts for the marvellous vitality and the enduring character of the spiritual culture of India. Even now the Vedic rituals are observed at the time of birth, marriage, death, and other important occasions of a man's life. Every orthodox Hindu belonging to the three upper castes recites, three times a day during his prayers, the same selections from the Vedas which his forbears repeated five thousand years ago, while his daily obligatory religious devotions are the remnants of similar obligatory sacrifices of the Vedic period.

Indian philosophy is divided into two classes: orthodox and heterodox. The orthodox philosophy is, again, subdivided into six groups. These groups are called orthodox because they rest upon the Vedas, not because they accept the idea of a Creator God. The Sāṃkhya philosophy, one of the orthodox systems, does not believe in God as the Creator of the universe. Jainism and Buddhism, on the other hand, are called unorthodox because they do not accept the Vedas as their authority. Yet they, too, have incorporated in their systems many of the Vedic doctrines. Thus the Vedas have influenced every vital phase of Hindu life. The Smritis and other canonical laws, which govern the life of a Hindu, derive their validity from the Vedas. In Hindu society the laws that regulate the inheritance of property, adoption of children, and other social, legal, domestic, and religious customs, claim to derive their authority from the Vedas. Hindu society has always drawn its power and vision from the spiritual experiences of its ancient seers. Under the crust of the many superstitions of the present-day society, the penetrating eye can still discern the shining core of the Vedic wisdom.

Yet this wisdom, the Knowledge of Brahman, is not the monopoly of any country, sect, or race. It was developed in a special manner on the banks of the Ganges and the Indus by the Indo-Āryan seers; nevertheless, like Brahman Itself, Brahmadevīyā is universal. It belongs to all peoples and all times. It is the universal truth that is the common essence of all religions and faiths.

## DISCUSSION OF BRAHMAN IN THE UPANISHADS

THE INDO-ĀRYAN THINKERS, as early as the times of the Rig-Veda, recognized the eternal Unity of Existence which "holds in Its embrace all that has come to be." This Unity pervades the universe and yet remains beyond it. All objects, animate and inanimate, are included in It. Gods, men, and subhuman beings are parts of It. As the unchanging Reality behind the universe, It was called Brahman by the Hindu philosophers; and as the indestructible Spirit in man, It was called Ātman. Brahman and Ātman, identical in nature, were the First Principle.

Derived from a root which means "to expand," the word Brahman denotes the Entity to whose greatness, magnitude, or expansion no one can put a limit or measure. The word Ātman is used to denote the immutable inner Consciousness, which experiences gross objects during the waking state, subtle objects during the dream state, and during dreamless sleep, when the subject-object relationship ceases to exist, an ineffable bliss. This is the unchanging and transcendental Consciousness in man, present in his every act of cognition, no matter what the level or state of the experience.

Bādarāyana Vyāsa, in the *Brahma Sūtras*, describes Brahman as that "from which proceed the origin, the sustenance, and the dissolution" of the universe. He further states that the Vedas are the source of this Knowledge of Brahman, and that in Brahman all Vedāntic texts find their agreement and harmony. It is Brahman alone that appears as the universe. We read in the Upanishads: "All is, indeed, Brahman"; "The soul is Brahman"; "Brahman is Consciousness and Bliss"; "There is no multiplicity whatsoever."

### THE TWO ASPECTS OF BRAHMAN

The Upanishads describe Brahman as having two aspects: the one devoid of any qualifying characteristics (*nirviśeṣa*) and the other

endowed with qualities (saviśeṣa). The former is called also the Supreme Brahman (Para Brahman), while the latter is called the Inferior Brahman (Apara Brahman). The *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* describes the two forms as "gross and subtle, mortal and immortal, limited and unlimited, defined and undefined."<sup>1</sup>

When Brahman is said to be devoid of qualifying characteristics what is meant is that the Supreme Brahman cannot be pointed out or described by any characteristic signs; It is not to be comprehended by means of any attributes or indicative marks. For this reason It is called the unqualified (Nirguna) and unconditioned (Nirvikalpa) Brahman; It is devoid of any limiting adjunct (nirupādhi).

The Inferior Brahman, on the other hand, can be described by certain characteristic signs and recognized by virtue of Its attributes and proper marks. "Brahman," states Śaṅkarācārya in his commentary on *Brahma Sūtras* I. i. 2, "is apprehended under two forms: in the first place, as qualified by limiting conditions owing to the multiformity of the evolutions of name and form; in the second place, as being the opposite of this, that is to say, as being free from all limiting conditions whatever. Compare," says he, "the following passages: 'For where there is duality, as it were, then one sees another; but when only the Self is all this, how should one see another?'"<sup>2</sup> 'Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else—that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else—that is the finite. The Infinite is immortal; the finite, mortal.'<sup>3</sup> 'The wise one who, having produced all forms and made all names, sits calling [things by their names].'<sup>4</sup> 'Who is without parts, without actions, tranquil, faultless, taintless, the highest bridge to Immortality—like a fire that has consumed its fuel.'<sup>5</sup> 'Not this, not this.'<sup>6</sup> 'It is neither gross nor minute, neither short nor long.'<sup>7</sup> These passages, with many others, declare Brahman to possess two forms, according as It is the object either of Knowledge or of ignorance (avidyā)."

A striking passage regarding the attributeless Brahman declares: "It is neither gross nor minute, neither short nor long, neither redness nor

<sup>1</sup> *Br. Up.* II. iii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. v. 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Chh. Up.* VII. xxiv. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Tat. Ār.* III. xii. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Śvet. Up.* VI. 19.

<sup>6</sup> *Br. Up.* II. iii. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Br. Up.* III. viii. 8.

moisture, neither shadow nor darkness, neither air nor ākāśa, unattached, without savour or odour, without eyes or ears, without vocal organ or mind, non-luminous, without vital force or mouth, without measure, and without interior or exterior."<sup>8</sup> The Inferior Brahman, Brahman with positive attributes, on the other hand, has been described as He "whose body is spirit, whose form is light, whose thoughts are true, whose nature is like ākāśa, from whom all works, all desires, all odours, and all tastes proceed."<sup>9</sup> The Upanishads tend to designate Brahman with attributes by the masculine "He," and the attributeless Brahman by the neuter "It."

But what is the final conclusion of the Upanishads concerning the ultimate nature of Brahman? Is the ultimate Brahman devoid of attributes or is It endowed with them? Śaṅkarācārya affirms that the purpose of Vedānta is to establish the attributeless Brahman as Ultimate Reality. He states, in his commentary on *Brahma Sūtras* III. ii. 11, that though Brahman has been described in the Upanishads as both Nirguna and Saguna, yet the goal of the scriptures is to uphold the unconditioned and attributeless Brahman as the Supreme Truth, and not the other; for the Upanishads, everywhere, when attempting to describe the ultimate nature of Brahman, have spoken of It as free of all attributes—for example, in such passages as the following: "Which is soundless, intangible, formless, undecaying."<sup>10</sup>

Rāmānuja, the chief exponent of the Qualified Non-dualistic School of Vedānta, declares, on the other hand, that the goal of the scriptures is to demonstrate the ultimate reality of Brahman as endowed with benign qualities only and free from all blemish. Śaṅkarācārya, therefore, stands as the upholder of an unconditioned and attributeless Brahman, while Rāmānuja represents the belief in a Brahman abounding in blessed attributes.<sup>11</sup>

Which is the true purport of Vedānta? We shall attempt to show, in the following pages, that Brahman is one and without a second and that the same Brahman has been described in two ways from two points of view. The one may be called the empirical or ordinary (vyāvahārika) point of view, and the other, the real or transcendental (pāramārthika).

<sup>8</sup> *Br. Up.* III. viii. 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Chh. Up.* III. xiv. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ka. Up.* I. iii. 15.

<sup>11</sup> There are other schools of Vedānta. One, for example, propounded by Nimbārka, says that there are in Brahman both non-duality and duality (dvaitādvaita), and that the two aspects are equally real.

The first is upheld by those who regard the world as real and therefore describe Brahman as its omnipotent and omnipresent Creator, Sustainer, and Destroyer; such a Brahman is, to be sure, Saguna, endowed with attributes. But according to the opposite opinion, the world of names and forms is finally unreal and only Brahman exists. All that is perceived anywhere is Brahman alone, and this Brahman is unconditioned, free from all qualities or attributes. Therefore there can be, in truth, no such thing as a Creator, Sustainer, and Destroyer of the universe, endowed with omnipotence, omniscience, and other qualities. From this point of view Brahman is Nirguna. Thus the same indefinable Reality is described in two different ways according to the point of view of the perceiver.

In order to show that Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman refer essentially to the same Reality, the Upanishads sometimes use in the same verse both neuter and masculine gender in connexion with Brahman: "*Which otherwise cannot be seen or seized, which is without origin and qualities, without eyes and ears, without hands and feet; which is eternal and omnipresent, all-pervading and extremely subtle; which is imperishable and is the source of all beings.*"<sup>12</sup> The italicized words in the original text are in the neuter gender, and the rest are in the masculine.

What we shall see is that Brahman, in association with māyā, which is Its own inscrutable power, becomes the Creator of the universe and is then called Saguna Brahman. It is then also known as the Great Lord (Maheśvara) and Bhagavān. "The non-dual Consciousness, which the knower of Truth describes as the Reality (Tattvam), is also Brahman and the Supreme Soul (Paramātmān) and God (Bhagavān)."<sup>13</sup>

### NIRGUNA BRAHMAN

Nirguna Brahman, as has already been stated, cannot be characterized by any indicative marks, qualities, or attributes. Therefore It is not describable by words. "From whence all speech, with the mind, turns away, unable to reach It."<sup>14</sup> Śrī Ramakrishna has said that all the scriptures and statements of holy men have been polluted, as it were, like food that has come in contact with the human tongue; Brahman alone

<sup>12</sup> *Mu. Up.* I. i. 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Bh.* I. ii. 11.

<sup>14</sup> *Tai. Up.* II. iv. 1.

remains unpolluted, because no tongue has been able to touch It. Brahman "cannot be attained by speech, by the mind, or by the eye."<sup>15</sup> That is why the attributeless Brahman is explained sometimes by silence. Śāṅkara declares, in his commentary on *Brahma Sūtras* III. ii. 17, that Bādhva, being questioned about Brahman by Bāshkalin, explained It to him by silence. "He said to Bāshkalin: 'Learn Brahman, O friend,' and became silent. Then, on a second and third questioning, Bādhva replied: 'I am teaching you indeed, but you do not understand. Silence is that Self.' "

The impossibility of knowing Brahman by any human means has been most emphatically expressed in the famous formula employed by Yājñavalkya: *Neti, neti*—"Not this, not this." "He, this Self, is that which has been described as 'Not this, not this.' "<sup>16</sup>

In describing the attributeless Brahman, the Upanishads employ, usually, the technique of negation:

"Which otherwise cannot be seen or seized, which has no root or attributes, no eyes or ears, no hands or feet; . . . which is imperishable and the source of all beings."<sup>17</sup>

"Turiya (the attributeless Brahman) is not that which is conscious of the internal (subjective) world, nor that which is conscious of the external (objective) world, nor that which is conscious of both, nor that which is a mass of sentiency, nor that which is simple consciousness, nor that which is insentient. It is unperceived [by any sense-organ], not related [to anything], incomprehensible [to the mind], uninferable, unthinkable, indescribable."<sup>18</sup>

The Upanishads abound in passages like the above. They all mean that Brahman is totally indescribable by the tongue and incomprehensible to the mind. Ultimate Reality is neither sun nor moon, neither star nor planet, neither god nor angel, neither man nor animal; It is not earth, water, fire, air, or space; It is not an object of sensation; It is completely different from all that is expressed by the tongue or conceived of by the mind.

We read in the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* that the learned and proud Bālāki approached King Ajātaśatru and said: "I will tell you about Brahman." He gave twelve descriptions of Brahman as the Soul (Purusha) in the sun, the moon, lightning, space, the wind, fire, water,

<sup>15</sup> *Ka. Up.* II. iii. 12.

<sup>16</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 22.

<sup>17</sup> *Mu. Up.* I. i. 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Mā. Up.* 7.

and so on; but each time he was told that these deities occupy subordinate positions in the whole of nature. The king then instructed Bālāki about Brahman through the illustration of deep sleep, which is the negation of all attributes and is, at the same time, the source of the positive experiences of the waking and the dream states.<sup>19</sup>

A great school of Buddhist philosophers has described Ultimate Reality as the Void (*Śūnyam*). A tangible object, a fruit for instance, is only a combination of attributes, such as colour, smell, taste, or touch. If these are eliminated, one by one, what remains is the Void of the Buddhists and the Brahman of the Vedāntists. Vedānta emphasizes the unknowability and indescribability of Ultimate Reality. Though unknown and unknowable, Brahman is yet the eternal "Knower of knowing" and also the goal of all knowledge. It is the Consciousness that functions through the senses but cannot be known by them. "How can you know the eternal Knower?" "It is different from the known; It is above the unknown."<sup>20</sup> Brahman is neither the subject nor the object; It is neither the knower nor knowledge nor what is known; It is neither the seer nor the seeing nor what is seen; It is neither gross nor subtle, neither great nor small, neither being nor non-being, neither happiness nor unhappiness, neither mind nor matter. It is beyond all notions of substance and attributes. Nothing whatsoever can be predicated of It. Yet the search for Brahman is not futile. The Upanishads reiterate that Its realization is the supreme purpose of life: "Having realized Ātman, . . . one is freed from the jaws of death."<sup>21</sup> It is the Supreme Unity of all contradictions: in It alone all differences are harmonized. "That which you see as other than righteousness and unrighteousness, other than all this cause and effect, other than what has been and what is to be—tell me That."<sup>22</sup>

Sometimes the Upanishads ascribe to Brahman irreconcilable attributes in order to deny in It all empirical predicates and to show that It is totally other than anything we know. "That non-dual Ātman, though never stirring, is swifter than the mind. The devas cannot reach It, for It moves ever in front. Though standing still, It overtakes others who are running."<sup>23</sup> "Though sitting still, It travels far; though lying down, It goes everywhere. Who but myself can know that luminous

<sup>19</sup> *Br. Up.* II. i.

<sup>20</sup> *Ke. Up.* I. 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ka. Up.* I. iii. 15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ka. Up.* I. ii. 14.

<sup>23</sup> *Iś. Up.* 4.

Ātman who rejoices and rejoices not?"<sup>24</sup> Brahman is often described as "subtler than an atom and greater than the great." The two attributes, though opposed to each other, are valid from the relative standpoint: Brahman is the essence of a subtle as well as of a gross substance. But these attributes do not apply to the Absolute Brahman.

The opposing predicates in the above-mentioned passages are ascribed to Brahman in such a manner that they cancel each other and leave to the mind the idea of an indefinable Pure Consciousness free of all attributes. Pure Consciousness in association with material upādhis appears to possess empirical qualities such as nearness and distance, or rest and movement, like a transparent crystal that assumes different colours in the presence of flowers of differing hue.

### THE UNCONDITIONED (NIRUPĀDHKA) BRAHMAN

Brahman is devoid of upādhis, or limiting adjuncts. The entire phenomenal universe is subject to the categories of space, time, and causation; but Brahman, the Supreme Reality, is beyond. In contrast with phenomenal objects, Brahman is not in space but is spaceless. Brahman is not in time but is timeless. Brahman is not subject to causality but independent of the causal chain. "That which is not destroyed when the upādhis of time, space, and causation are destroyed, is Brahman, the immortal Reality." In describing Brahman as omnipresent, all-pervading, unlimited, infinitely great and infinitely small, the Upanishads only point out that It is absolutely spaceless.

"That, O Gārgi, which is above heaven and below the earth, which is this heaven and earth as well as what is between them, and which they say was, is, and will be, is pervaded by the unmanifested ākāśa (Brahman)."<sup>25</sup>

"In the beginning Brahman was all this. He was one and infinite; infinite in the east, infinite in the south, infinite in the west, infinite in the north, above and below and everywhere infinite. East and the other regions do not exist for Him—no athwart, no beneath, no above. The Supreme Self is not to be fixed; He is unlimited, unborn, not to be reasoned about, not to be conceived."<sup>26</sup>

What exists in space can be measured. But Brahman is beyond space, and therefore immeasurable. Hence It can be described equally as all-

<sup>24</sup> *Ka. Up. I. ii. 21.*

<sup>25</sup> *Br. Up. III. viii. 7.*

<sup>26</sup> *Mai. Up. VI. 17.*



pervading, great, and omnipresent, or as atomic (anu), small as the point of a needle or as "the hundredth part of a hair."

"He is my Self within the heart, smaller than a corn of rice, smaller than a corn of barley, smaller than a mustard-seed, smaller than a canary-seed or the kernel of a canary-seed. He is my Self within the heart, greater than the earth, greater than the sky, greater than the heaven, greater than all these worlds."<sup>27</sup>

"The wise man, having realized the Self . . . as great and all-pervading, does not grieve."<sup>28</sup>

"That living soul (Brahman) is to be known as part of the hundredth part of the point of a hair, divided a hundred times; and yet It is to be known as infinite."<sup>29</sup>

Brahman, which is spaceless and immeasurable, is also indivisible. For the same reason Brahman is incorporeal and partless. "Who is without parts, without actions, tranquil, faultless, taintless, the highest bridge to Immortality—like a fire that has consumed its fuel."<sup>30</sup>

All that exists in space is divisible and therefore subject to plurality. But the indivisible and incorporeal Brahman is free from plurality. "What is here, the same is there; and what is there, the same is here. He goes from death to death who sees any difference here."<sup>31</sup>

The timelessness of Brahman is indicated by stating that It is free from the limitations of past, present, and future. Sometimes It is described as eternal, without beginning or end; sometimes as momentary, involving no time at all. "Other than what has been and what is to be."<sup>32</sup> "That which they say was, is, and will be."<sup>33</sup> "At whose feet, rolling on, the year with its days passes by—upon that immortal Light of all lights, the gods meditate as longevity."<sup>34</sup>

Brahman is described as instantaneous duration, through the illustration of lightning: "They say lightning is Brahman."<sup>35</sup> "It is like a flash of lightning; It is like a wink of the eye."<sup>36</sup>

Brahman is independent of causation. Causality is operative only in

<sup>27</sup> *Chh. Up.* III. xiv. 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Kat. Up.* I. ii. 22.

<sup>29</sup> *Śvet. Up.* V. 9.

<sup>30</sup> *Śvet. Up.* VI. 19.

<sup>31</sup> *Ka. Up.* II. i. 10.

<sup>32</sup> *Ka. Up.* I. ii. 14.

<sup>33</sup> *Br. Up.* III. viii. 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 16.

<sup>35</sup> *Br. Up.* V. vii. 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ke. Up.* IV. 4.

the realm of becoming and cannot affect Pure Being. Brahman is not the Creator of the universe in the sense that a potter is the creator of a pot, nor the cause of the universe in the sense that milk is the cause of curds. No change is possible in Brahman; It is Itself—causeless. Therefore It is called the Imperishable (Aksharam). "It should be realized in one form only; [for] It is unknowable and eternal. The Self is taintless, beyond the [subtle] ākāśa, birthless, infinite, and constant."<sup>37</sup> In other words, Brahman is free from all the transformations of birth, death, growth, decline, increase, and decrease. "The knowing Self is not born; It does not die. It has not sprung from anything; nothing has sprung from It. Birthless, eternal, everlasting, and ancient, It is not killed when the body is killed."<sup>38</sup>

### BRAHMAN IS UNKNOWABLE

It has already been stated that the Supreme Brahman cannot be identified by any characteristic sign or attribute. Therefore It is declared to be indescribable in words and unknowable to the mind (avāṅmanasagocharam). How is an object known? Either by a sense-organ or by the mind. Form is the object of the eye; sound, of the ear; touch, of the skin; smell, of the nose; and taste, of the tongue. But Brahman is without form, sound, touch, smell, or taste. "His form is not an object of vision; no one beholds Him with the eye."<sup>39</sup> The mind is termed by some Hindu psychologists the sixth organ of perception; by means of it one experiences such feelings as pleasure and pain, elation and depression. The determinative faculty of the mind is called the buddhi. When an object is grasped by the buddhi, it is already conditioned by the buddhi. But the infinite Brahman is unconditioned. Therefore It is not grasped by the buddhi. The light of Brahman endows the senses and the mind with their sentiency; they cannot enlighten Brahman.

To be known, a thing must be made an object. Brahman, as Pure Consciousness, is the eternal Subject; It cannot be made an object. One must presuppose Brahman in order to know objects; therefore one cannot know It as an object. Brahman, the substratum of all experience, cannot Itself be an object of experience. But, more properly, one cannot even say that Brahman is a subject; for a subject must have an object that it perceives. Nothing exists, however, except Brahman. All that can be said, then, of Brahman is that *It is*.

<sup>37</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 20.

<sup>38</sup> *Ka. Up.* I. ii. 18.

<sup>39</sup> *Ka. Up.* II. iii. 9.

"How can It be realized in any other way than by the affirmation of him who says: 'He is?'"<sup>40</sup> "He by whom Brahman is not known, knows It; he by whom It is known, knows It not. It is not known by those who know It; It is known by those who do not know It."<sup>41</sup> As long as one is conscious of the duality of subject and object, one does not know Brahman. The realization of this transcendent Absolute is an inexpressible experience in which the distinction between subject, object, and knowledge is annihilated and they become one.

Since Brahman, as the "Knower of knowing," can never become an object for us, It is called unknowable. "You cannot see That which is the Witness of vision; you cannot hear That which is the Hearer of hearing; you cannot think of That which is the Thinker of thought; you cannot know That which is the Knower of knowledge."<sup>42</sup> "He is never seen, but is the Witness; He is never heard, but is the Hearer; He is never thought of, but is the Thinker; He is never known, but is the Knower. There is no other witness but Him, no other hearer but Him, no other thinker but Him, no other knower but Him."<sup>43</sup> "That which cannot be expressed by speech, but by which speech is expressed—That alone know as Brahman, and not that which people here worship. That which cannot be apprehended by the mind, but by which, they say, the mind is apprehended—That alone know as Brahman, and not that which people here worship."<sup>44</sup>

Brahman is unknowable for still another reason: It is *bhumā*, infinite. "The Infinite (*bhumā*) is bliss; there is no bliss in anything finite. Infinity alone is bliss. This Infinity, however, we must desire to understand."<sup>45</sup>

What is the Infinite? This is how It is described in the Upanishads: "Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else—that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else—that is the finite. The Infinite is immortal; the finite, mortal. Sir, in what does the Infinite rest? In Its own greatness—no, not even in greatness."<sup>46</sup>

Brahman is "one and without a second"—*ekamevādvitīyam*. The

<sup>40</sup> *Ka. Up.* II. iii. 12.

<sup>41</sup> *Ke. Up.* II. 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Br. Up.* III. iv. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Br. Up.* III. vii. 23.

<sup>44</sup> *Ke. Up.* I. 5-6.

<sup>45</sup> *Chh. Up.* VII. xxiii. 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Chh. Up.* VII. xxiv. 1.

second part of this phrase ("and without a second"), qualifying the first ("one"), is important; for what it means is that Brahman is not one in the sense that the sun or the moon is one, or in the sense that the God of the monotheist is one. In such a case there is a perceiver of the oneness—which implies duality. When the non-duality of Brahman is completely realized, there is absolutely no consciousness of subject and object; the distinction between perceiver and perceived is annihilated and they become one.

Three kinds of difference are distinguished in the relative world: (1) A tree is different (*vijātiya-bheda*) from a stone. (2) The oak is different (*svajātiya-bheda*) from the poplar. (3) In the same tree, the blossom is different (*svagata-bheda*) from the leaf. All of these differences disappear in Brahman, which is homogeneous Consciousness without a break. That is why Brahman is unknowable.

"Because when there is duality, as it were, then one smells something, one sees something, one hears something, one speaks something, one thinks something, one knows something. [But] when to the knower of Brahman everything has become the Self, then what should one smell and by what means, what should one see and by what means, what should one hear and by what means, what should one speak and by what means, what should one know and by what means? By what means should one know That, owing to which all this is known—by what means, O Maitreyi, should one know the Knower?"<sup>47</sup>

### SACHCHIDĀNANDA (EXISTENCE-KNOWLEDGE-BLISS ABSOLUTE)

The Vedānta philosophy often describes Brahman by the term *Sachchidānanda*, a compound consisting of three words: *Sat* (Existence, Reality, or Being), *Chit* (Consciousness, or Knowledge), and *Ānandam* (Bliss). This term, however, does not appear in any of the principal *Upanishads*, though Brahman is often described in them by such separate terms as Reality, Consciousness, and Bliss. "He perceived that Bliss is Brahman, for from Bliss these beings are born; by Bliss, when born, they live; into Bliss they enter at their death."<sup>48</sup> "Brahman is Reality, Consciousness, and Infinity."<sup>49</sup> "Brahman is Knowledge."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *Br. Up.* II. iv. 14.

<sup>48</sup> *Tat. Up.* III. vi. 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Tat. Up.* II. i. 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Tat. Up.* II. v. 1.

"Brahman is Knowledge and Bliss."<sup>51</sup> The *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* asks us to worship Brahman as Prajñā (Consciousness), as Satyam (Truth), and as Ānandam (Bliss). Nevertheless, it is only in the minor Upanishads that the compound term Sachchidānanda occurs as an epithet of Brahman.<sup>52</sup>

Is this epithet meant to apply to the unconditioned Nirguna Brahman, or to Saguna Brahman, Brahman with attributes? According to some, the words Sat, Chit, and Ānandam refer to Saguna Brahman; according to others, to Nirguna Brahman. The former group contends that the words are positive characterizing terms, and therefore cannot be employed in connexion with the Supreme Brahman, which is to be described, as we have already seen, only by negation. The Supreme Brahman is neither being nor non-being, neither consciousness nor matter, neither happiness nor unhappiness. "When the light has risen, there is no day, no night, neither existence nor non-existence; Śiva (the Blessed One) alone is there."<sup>53</sup> Likewise, Consciousness is denied in the Supreme Brahman. It is one and without a second. Nothing exists besides. How, then, can Brahman be Consciousness, in the absence of an object? When there is duality, then one knows another; but when the Self alone is all, how should one know another?<sup>54</sup> In reply, it cannot be contended that the Supreme Brahman knows Itself, that It is both subject and object; for, as Śaṅkarāchārya says, the non-dual Ātman cannot be, at the same time, both the knower and the object of knowledge, since It is partless; it is unreasonable to apply simultaneously the notion of knower and object of knowledge to what is incorporeal. And finally, for the same reasons, Ānandam cannot be an epithet appropriate to the Brahman without attributes. According to this school, therefore, the epithet Sachchidānanda can apply only to Saguna Brahman, the Great Lord (Maheśvara), who, by means of māyā, becomes the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the universe.

But according to the other view, Sat, Chit, and Ānandam can very well refer to the attributeless Brahman; for these words are used, it is declared, in a negative sense. Sat indicates that Brahman is not non-

<sup>51</sup> *Br. Up.* III. ix. 28.

<sup>52</sup> *Nṛsiṃhauṭtaratāpini Up.* VI, VII; *Rāmapurvatāpini Up.* V. 8; *Rāmāut-taratāpini Up.* II; *Mat. Up.* III. 12. (The references in this note are taken from *The One Hundred and Eight Upanishads*, published by the Nirṇayasāgar Press, Bombay; third edition.)

<sup>53</sup> *Śvet. Up.* IV. 18.

<sup>54</sup> See *Br. Up.* IV. v. 15.

being; Chit, that Brahman is not nescient; and Ānandam, that Brahman is not a mere absence of pain. By such denial the positive nature of Brahman as the Absolute is affirmed.

Brahman does not exist as an empirical object—for instance, like a pot or a tree—but as Absolute Existence, without which material objects would not be perceived to exist. Just as a mirage cannot be seen without the desert, which is its unrelated substratum, so also the universe cannot exist without Brahman. Further, when the Vedāntic process of negation is followed, step by step, to its conclusion, there remains a residuum of existence, or being. No object, illusory or otherwise, could exist without the foundation of an immutable Existence; and that is Brahman. Therefore the term Sat, or Existence, as applied to Brahman, is to be understood as the negation of both empirical reality and its correlative, unreality.

The Chit, or Consciousness, of Brahman, unlike the consciousness of the mind, is not related to an object. That Chit is Absolute Consciousness, which illumines the activities of the senses and mind during their states of waking and dreaming, as well as their inactivity in dreamless sleep.

Likewise, Ānandam, or Absolute Bliss, must be understood as the negation of the happiness that we ordinarily know or experience from the contact of a sense-organ with its object. It may be likened to the bliss that accompanies deep sleep, when the distinction of subject and object is effaced and when, therefore, empirical consciousness itself ceases to function. The knower of Truth always experiences this Bliss devoid of the relationship of subject and object.

Sat, Chit, and Ānandam—Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss—then, are not attributes of Brahman, but Its very essence. Brahman is not endowed with them: Brahman is Existence itself, Consciousness itself, and Bliss itself. In the Absolute there is no distinction between substance and attributes. Sat, Chit, and Ānandam denote the same entity: when one of them is present, the other two are also present. Absolute Being is Absolute Consciousness and Absolute Bliss.

Let us see, therefore, what the Upanishads have to say about these separate epithets of Brahman, since, as we have mentioned, the compound term does not appear until a later period of Vedāntic thought.

### BRAHMAN AS SAT (EXISTENCE)

In describing the true nature of Brahman, the Upanishads frequently use the term Satyam, which means Truth, Reality, Being,

Existence. "Brahman is Being, Consciousness, and Infinity."<sup>55</sup> "In the beginning, my dear, there was That only which is one only, without a second."<sup>56</sup> It is the True. It is the Self. And thou, O Svetaketu, art It."<sup>57</sup>

There are, to be sure, passages in the Upanishads which state that *non-being* was in the beginning: "In the beginning all this was non-existent. It became existent; it grew. It turned into an egg."<sup>58</sup> "This universe, in truth, in the beginning was nothing at all. There was no heaven, no earth, no atmosphere. This being, that was solely non-being, conceived a wish: 'May I be.'<sup>59</sup> As early as the Rig-Veda, it is said of the primeval condition of things that at that time there was *na asat, na u sat*, neither non-being nor being. But in these texts "non-being" is used in the sense of "non-manifestation." That is to say, before the creation of names and forms, these things existed only in an unmanifested state. The word *sat* (being) in the Rig-Veda signifies *empirical* being.

Non-being, in the absolute sense, cannot *be* in the beginning. "In the beginning, my dear, there was that only which is one only, without a second; others say, in the beginning there was that only which is not one only, without a second; and from that which is not, that which is was born. But how could it be thus, my dear?' the father continued. 'How could that which is be born out of that which is not? No, my dear, only that which *is* was in the beginning, one only, without a second.'<sup>60</sup>

The word beginning (*agrē*) in the text quoted above does not denote time. It indicates Brahman in Its purest essence, unassociated with the upādhis of creation, preservation, and destruction. Brahman is beyond time. Time, space, and causality belong to *māyā*. Not only before creation, but always, Brahman is Pure Consciousness, one and without a second.

"Its secret name is *Satyasya Satyam*, the Truth of truth."<sup>61</sup> This remarkable statement points out that Brahman alone is Ultimate Reality

<sup>55</sup> *Tat. Up.* II. i. 3.

<sup>56</sup> *Chh. Up.* VI. ii. 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Chh. Up.* VI. viii. 7.

<sup>58</sup> *Chh. Up.* III. xix. 1.

<sup>59</sup> *Tai. Br.* II. ii. 9. 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Chh. Up.* VI. ii. 1-2.

<sup>61</sup> *Br. Up.* II. i. 20.

and that the reality of the tangible universe is only apparent and derivative. The empirical reality of things is derived from the Absolute Reality of Brahman, as the apparent reality of a mirage is derived from the reality of the desert. The universe is transitory, perishable, and changing. Brahman, on the contrary, is eternal, undecaying, and immutable. What is the meaning of empirical reality? An empirically real object is, indeed, non-real. Like a dream, it has not existed in the past, will not exist in the future, but exists only at the time it is perceived. Or it existed yesterday but does not exist now. Or it does not exist now but may come into being tomorrow. An object perceived in the waking state may not be seen in dreams; or what is seen in dreams may not be seen in the waking state or in deep sleep. Such an object is said to be empirically real; but it is ultimately unreal and non-existent. "That which does not exist in the beginning and in the end is necessarily so (non-existent) in the middle. Objects are like the illusions we see; still they are regarded as if real."<sup>62</sup>

But Brahman alone, as Being, exists always—in the past, present, and future. "In the beginning all this was Ātman only, one and without a second."<sup>63</sup> "Ātman alone is all this."<sup>64</sup> The word *this* in the texts quoted above denotes the tangible universe. According to the Upanishads, this transitory and empirical universe, when free from māyā—which, as will be explained later, is the cause of the manifestation of the diversity of names and forms—is Brahman alone.

Brahman is the very root of the universe. "Seek after its root, which is the True. Yes, all these creatures, my son, have their root in the True, they dwell in the True, they rest in the True."<sup>65</sup> Everything perceived is, in essence, Brahman alone. "All this is verily Brahman."<sup>66</sup>

The multiplicity that people take to be real is not truly so. "There is no second thing separate from It which It can see."<sup>67</sup> "Through the mind alone [purified by Knowledge] is It to be realized. There is no differentiation whatsoever in Brahman. He goes from death to death who sees in It, as it were, differentiation."<sup>68</sup>

What, then, is this duality or multiplicity, whose reality the Upan-

<sup>62</sup> *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā. II. 6.*

<sup>63</sup> *At. Up. I. i. 1.*

<sup>64</sup> *Chh. Up. VII. xxv. 2.*

<sup>65</sup> *Chh. Up. VI. viii. 4.*

<sup>66</sup> *Chh. Up. III. xiv. 1.*

<sup>67</sup> *Br. Up. IV. iii. 23.*

<sup>68</sup> *Br. Up. IV. iv. 19.*



ishads so vehemently deny in order to demonstrate the sole Reality of Brahman? This duality is *māyā*. "If the manifold universe had real existence, one could then speak of its disappearance. This duality is only *māyā*; non-duality alone is real."<sup>69</sup> Duality is but an appearance, perceived as real when the Truth is hidden; but *jnāte dvaitam na vidyate*—"when the Truth is revealed, duality does not exist." All experiences in the empirical world are *māyā*. "When there is duality, as it were, then one smells something, one sees something, one hears something, one says something."<sup>70</sup> The phrase "as it were" (*iva*) is the very crux of the Upanishadic instruction regarding the universe and our daily life in it. Whenever the Upanishads seem to concede the reality of the world, even in the slightest degree, the phrase "as it were" is to be added; for anything "other" than Brahman is an appearance only.

In the *Chhāndogya Upanishad* there is a celebrated scene in which the sage Āruni gives instruction to his son.<sup>71</sup> "Śvetaketu," says the father, "since you are so conceited, considering yourself so well read, and so stern, my dear, have you ever asked for that instruction by which we hear what cannot be heard, by which we perceive what cannot be perceived, by which we know what cannot be known?" "What is that instruction, sir?" asks the son. Āruni replies: "My dear, just as by one clod of clay all that is made of clay may be known, the difference (*vikāra*)<sup>72</sup> being only a name, arising from speech, but the truth being that all is clay; and just as, my dear, by one nugget of gold all that is made of gold may be known, the difference being only a name arising from speech, but the truth being that all is gold . . . even so, my dear, is that instruction."

The effect, apart from the cause, is nothing but a name, a mere matter of words; it is, in essence, the same as the cause. We distinguish the effect from the cause by superimposing upon the latter a name and a form to serve a practical purpose of life in the empirical world. This name and form, apart from the substratum, is *māyā*. Practically, one may see a gold bracelet or a gold earring and the difference between them, but in truth they are only gold. It is the same with the ocean and its waves, which are identical in essence. Likewise, the non-dual Brahman alone appears as the universe and its objects. Just as, from

<sup>69</sup> *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā. I. 17.*

<sup>70</sup> *Br. Up. II. iv. 14.*

<sup>71</sup> VI. i. 3-5.

<sup>72</sup> I.e. the effect.

the standpoint of name and form, one distinguishes between a bracelet and an earring, so also, from the standpoint of name and form, one makes distinctions between the various objects of the world; yet all are, in reality, Brahman. For nothing whatsoever exists but Brahman. If a man believes that he sees something other than Brahman, he is being deceived by an illusion. What an ignorant person, a victim of *māyā*, regards as the universe, endowed with names and forms and characterized by the interplay of the pairs of opposites, is realized by the illumined soul to be the non-dual Brahman, just as the water of a mirage, which is seen by a deluded man, is realized by a knowing person to be dry sand. But *samsāra*, or the relative world, as such, the Upanishad warns, is not Brahman, or Ultimate Reality. Time, space, and causation, which are projected by *māyā*, create *samsāra* and account for its unreality. *Māyā* itself is unreal.

The perception of difference is the cause of fear and grief. "The *brāhmin* rejects one who knows him as different from the Self. The *kshattriya* rejects one who knows him as different from the Self. The worlds reject one who knows them as different from the Self. The gods reject one who knows them as different from the Self. The beings reject one who knows them as different from the Self. The All rejects one who knows it as different from the Self. This *brāhmin*, this *kshattriya*, these worlds, these gods, these beings, and this All are the Self."<sup>73</sup> "That which is the subtle essence (the root of all)—in It all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self. And thou, O *Śvetaketu*, art It."<sup>74</sup>

There are passages in the Upanishads which, in order to emphasize the sole reality of Brahman, describe all objects as Its manifestations or expressions. "As a spider moves along the thread [that it produces], and as from a fire tiny sparks fly in all directions, so from the Self emanate all organs and all the worlds, all gods, all beings."<sup>75</sup>

"This *Brahmā*, this *Indra*, this *Creator*, all these gods, these five great elements—earth, air, space, water, fire—and all these small creatures, these other creatures, these seeds of creation, and these egg-born, these womb-born, these sweat-born, these earth-born, horses, cows, men, elephants, and whatever else breathes and moves, or flies—as well as whatever is immovable—these all are guided by Knowledge (*Pra-*

<sup>73</sup> *Br. Up.* II. iv. 6.

<sup>74</sup> *Chh. Up.* VI. xii. 3.

<sup>75</sup> *Br. Up.* II. i. 20.

jñānam) and supported by Knowledge. The universe has Knowledge for its eyes. Knowledge is the foundation. Knowledge is Brahman."<sup>76</sup>

Since the apparent multiplicity is in essence Brahman, one must understand Brahman to understand the universe. "By the realization of the Self, my dear, through hearing, reflection, and meditation, all this is known."<sup>77</sup> The rishis of ancient times, endowed with the Knowledge of Brahman, confidently declared their omniscience. "Great householders and great knowers of the Vedas, of olden times, who knew this, declared the same, saying: 'No one can henceforth mention to us anything that we have not heard, perceived, or known.'"<sup>78</sup> Therefore Brahman, Absolute Being, is Ultimate Reality. "The whole universe is filled by this Person (Purusha), to whom there is nothing superior, from whom there is nothing different, than whom there is nothing smaller or larger, who stands alone, silent as a tree, established in His resplendent glory."<sup>79</sup>

### BRAHMAN AS CHIT (CONSCIOUSNESS)

Many philosophers in the East and the West have come to the conclusion that the soul is to be conceived of as something similar to reason, spirit, thought, or intelligence. The very conception of Ātman in the Upanishads implies that the First Principle of things must above all be sought in man's inmost self. The core of Yājñavalkya's teachings in the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* is that Brahman, or Ātman, is the knowing subject within us. In the fourth section of chapter three of this Upanishad, Ushasta challenges Yājñavalkya to explain "Brahman that is immediate and direct—the Self that is within all." Yājñavalkya replies with a reference to Ātman, which animates the activities of the prāṇa, or vital breath. Pressed further by his opponent, he answers: "You cannot see That which is the Seer of seeing; you cannot hear That which is the Hearer of hearing; you cannot think of That which is the Thinker of thought; you cannot know That which is the Knower of knowledge. This is your Self, that is within all; everything else but This is perishable."

How is the mental form of an object illumined by the light of Ātman? The image of an object is carried to the brain by a sense-organ,

<sup>76</sup> *At. Up.* III. i. 3.

<sup>77</sup> *Br. Up.* II. iv. 5.

<sup>78</sup> *Chh. Up.* VI. iv. 5.

<sup>79</sup> *Svet. Up.* III. 9.

for instance the eye. After passing through various sheaths (kośas),<sup>80</sup> it reaches at last, according to the Hindu psychologists, the sheath of the intellect. There the light of Brahman, or the Self, which is reflected in the intellect, illumines the mental state regarding the object, and thus one becomes aware of it. The mental image of the object is transformed into knowledge of the object. But this mental state is impermanent; therefore the consciousness—which in reality is Brahman—associated with the mental state appears to be impermanent.

A colourless crystal, as we have said, in the proximity of flowers of different hues appears to be blue, red, yellow, or pink. Likewise, Pure Consciousness, which is a man's inmost Self, when associated with the upādhis of different mental states, appears in different forms. One has the knowledge of a tree, a house, a stone, or any other object, and consciousness appears in association with these objects. Or one feels happy, unhappy, greedy, lustful, or angry, and again consciousness appears only in association. One believes that the Self is happy or unhappy. These emotions, however, do not pertain to the Self. They belong only to the mind, and the mind is not Ātman, though it is the instrument through which the Consciousness of Ātman manifests itself. Consciousness, which is a homogeneous entity, is in itself eternal, not discontinuous. It remains the same in past, present, and future. It does not come into existence, nor is it ever destroyed. This Consciousness is Brahman.

Generally the experiences in the waking state are different from the experiences of a dream, and these again from those of deep sleep. But the Consciousness that illumines all the three mental states never changes. The most graphic exposition of Ātman as the Knowing Subject, persisting without change through the states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, death, rebirth, and the final Liberation of the soul, is given in the third section of the fourth chapter of the *Bṛihad-āranyaka Upanishad*. Here King Janaka asks of Yājñavalkya: "What serves a man for a light?" The sage first gives the simple answer that the sun serves a man for light: by the light of the sun he sits, goes out, works, and returns home. When, however, the sun has set? asks the king. The moon, replies the sage. And when the moon also has set?—Fire. And when the fire is extinguished?—The voice. But when the voice also is silenced? At last Yājñavalkya has to give the real answer. Then "the Self serves as his light. It is through the

<sup>80</sup> See *Self-Knowledge*, by Swami Nikhilananda, p. 81 ff.

light of the Self that he sits, goes out, works, and returns home." What is this Self? It is the infinite Consciousness dwelling within him, in the midst of his organs, and identified with his intellect. It is the light within his heart. It roams through the world of waking and dreaming, assuming the likeness of the intellect. It moves through this life and the hereafter and shares in their experiences of good and evil. In dreams it puts aside the waking body and creates a dream body. It creates dream objects: chariots, animals, and roads; pleasures, joys, and delights; lakes, pools, and rivers. The Self is the creator in the dream and Itself is the light to illumine the dream objects. It enjoys Itself in the company of women, laughing; sometimes It sees frightful things. Afterwards the Self moves into a state of deep sleep and there experiences complete rest and peace, owing to the absence of subject and object and of desires. Like a great fish swimming alternately to both banks of a river, the infinite Self moves to both these states, dreaming and waking; then, just as a hawk or a falcon flying in the sky becomes tired and, stretching its wings, proceeds, soaring, to its nest, so does the infinite Self proceed to the state of deep sleep, where It feels no desires and sees no dreams. In that state the Self has no consciousness of objects and yet is not unconscious.

But nevertheless, though moving—as it were—through the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, or through different births, the Self remains—in reality—untouched by their experiences; for "nothing cleaves to the Self."

It is the inner Consciousness, the Self, that is the real agent of perception; the senses are mere instruments. "He who knows: 'Let me smell this'—he is Ātman; the nose is the instrument of smelling. He who knows: 'Let me say this'—he is Ātman; the tongue is the instrument of saying. He who knows: 'Let me hear this'—he is Ātman; the ear is the instrument of hearing. He who knows: 'Let me think this'—he is Ātman; the mind is his divine eye."<sup>81</sup> "Into Him, as eye, all forms are gathered; by the eye He reaches all forms. Into Him, as ear, all sounds are gathered; by the ear He reaches all sounds."

As Brahman is the essence of Being, so It is the essence of Consciousness or Light. Brahman needs no other light to illumine Itself. It is self-luminous. "It is pure; It is the Light of lights; It is That which they know who know the Self."<sup>82</sup> All material objects, such as trees, rivers,

<sup>81</sup> *Chh. Up.* VIII. xii. 4-5.

<sup>82</sup> *Mu. Up.* II. ii. 9.

houses, forests, are illumined by the sun. But the light that illumines the sun is the light of Brahman. "The sun does not shine there, nor the moon and the stars, nor these lightnings, not to speak of this fire. When He shines, everything shines after Him; by His light everything is lighted."<sup>83</sup>

### BRAHMAN AS ĀNANDAM (BLISS)

"He perceived that Bliss is Brahman."<sup>84</sup> The *Bṛihadāranyaka Upaniṣad* describes Brahman as Consciousness and Bliss.<sup>85</sup> Bliss is not an attribute of Brahman; it is Brahman Itself. Brahman as Bliss means that Bliss is Its very being, as is Consciousness. Brahman is the immeasurable ocean of Bliss—the Bliss that knows no change. It is important to remember that no real Bliss is possible without Knowledge or Consciousness—*natu jñānād bhinnam sukhāmasti*.

Needless to say, the Bliss that is the very substance of Brahman is not to be confused with the happiness that a man experiences when in contact with an agreeable sense-object. Worldly bliss is but an infinitesimal part of the Bliss of Brahman, the Bliss of Brahman coming through an earthly medium.

The Bliss of Brahman pervades all objects. Without it a man could not live. "He who is self-created is Bliss. A man experiences happiness by tasting that Bliss. Who could breathe, who could live, if that Bliss did not exist in his heart?"<sup>86</sup> For a more vivid description: "It is not for the sake of the husband, my dear, that the husband is loved, but for the sake of the Self that he is loved. It is not for the sake of the wife, my dear, that the wife is loved, but for the sake of the Self that she is loved. It is not for the sake of the sons, my dear, that the sons are loved, but for the sake of the Self that they are loved. It is not for the sake of wealth, my dear, that wealth is loved, but for the sake of the Self that it is loved."<sup>87</sup> The same formula is repeated in reference to the brāhmin and kṣhattṛiya castes, the worlds, the gods, created beings, and all things. Then the magnificent passage concludes with the following exhortation: "The Self, my dear Maitreyi, should be realized—should be heard about, reflected on, and meditated upon. By

<sup>83</sup> *Mu. Up.* II. ii. 10.

<sup>84</sup> *Tat. Up.* III. vi. 1.

<sup>85</sup> *III. ix.* 28.

<sup>86</sup> *Tat. Up.* II. vii. 1.

<sup>87</sup> *Br. Up.* II. iv. 5.

the realization of the Self, my dear, through hearing, reflection, and meditation, all this [world] is known."

Brahman is Bliss because in It there is an utter absence of sorrow and also because It is Infinity. Anything that is not Brahman is full of suffering—*ato anyad ārtam*. "The Self is free from sin, free from old age, from death and grief, from hunger and thirst, imagining nothing but what It ought to imagine, and desiring nothing but what It ought to desire. He is the Highest Lord, He is the supreme Master of all beings, the Guardian of all beings, a boundary keeping all things apart and in their right places."<sup>88</sup>

Brahman is Bliss because It is Infinity. That which is Infinity is Bliss; there is no bliss in the finite. Of the blissful Ātman it is said: "Joy is His head, satisfaction is His right side, great satisfaction is His left side, bliss is His trunk, and Brahman is His support."<sup>89</sup> "He who knows the Bliss of Brahman—from which all speech, together with the mind, turns away, unable to reach It—fears nothing."<sup>90</sup>

An experience known to all, which gives an idea of the Bliss of Brahman, is the state of deep sleep.<sup>91</sup> At that time the Self remains bereft of desire, fear, and evil. It remains completely unrelated to the world. Its bliss is due to the absence of all consciousness of duality. "As a man fully embraced by his loving wife does not know anything at all, either external or internal, so does this Infinite Being (the Self) fully embraced by the Supreme Self not know anything at all, either external or internal. . . . In this state a father is no father, a mother no mother, the worlds are no worlds, the gods no gods, the Vedas no Vedas. In this state a thief is no thief, the killer of a noble brāhmin no killer, a chandāla no chandāla,<sup>92</sup> a paulkasa no paulkasa,<sup>93</sup> a monk no monk, a hermit no hermit. [When in this form he] is untouched by good work and untouched by evil work, for he has then overcome all the sorrows of his heart (intellect)."<sup>94</sup>

There is a difference, however, between deep sleep and the experience of Brahman. The infinite Bliss of Brahman simply cannot be conceived of by the finite mind.

<sup>88</sup> *Mai. Up.* VII. 7.

<sup>89</sup> *Tai. Up.* II. 5.

<sup>90</sup> *Tai. Up.* II. 9.

<sup>91</sup> See pp. 93-94.

<sup>92</sup> The son of a śudra father and a brāhmin mother.

<sup>93</sup> The son of a śudra father and a kshattriya mother.

<sup>94</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 21-22.

"Now this is an examination of what is meant by Bliss (Ānandam): Let there be a noble young man who is well read [in the Vedas], very swift, firm, and strong, and let the whole world be full of wealth for him—that is one measure of human bliss.

"One hundred times that human bliss is one measure of the bliss of human gandharvas, and likewise of a great sage [learned in the Vedas] and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the human gandharvas is one measure of the bliss of divine gandharvas, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the divine gandharvas is one measure of the bliss of the Fathers, enjoying their celestial life, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the Fathers is one measure of the bliss of the devas who are endowed with heavenly bodies through the merit of their lawful duties, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the devas is one measure of the bliss of the devas who are endowed with heavenly bodies through the merit of their Vedic sacrifices, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the sacrificial gods is one measure of the bliss of the thirty-three devas who live on the sacrificial offerings, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of the thirty-three devas is one measure of the bliss of Indra,<sup>95</sup> and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of Indra is one measure of the bliss of Brihaspati,<sup>96</sup> and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of Brihaspati is one measure of the bliss of Prajāpati,<sup>97</sup> and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires.

"One hundred times that bliss of Prajāpati is one measure of the Bliss of Brahman, and likewise of a great sage learned in the Vedas and free from desires."<sup>98</sup>

<sup>95</sup> The king of the gods.

<sup>96</sup> The spiritual preceptor of the gods.

<sup>97</sup> The first manifestation of the Absolute, known as the World Soul.

<sup>98</sup> *Tai. Up.* II. viii. 1-4.



In other words, the Bliss of Brahman cannot be measured by any relative standard, human or otherwise. Through the performance of the sacrifices prescribed in the scriptures, one may experience, after death, measures of this bliss in ascending degrees in the different heavenly worlds. But if one assimilates the teachings of the Vedas and renounces desire through the practice of spiritual discipline, one can enjoy those measures of bliss here on earth. Moreover, if a sage is completely free from desires, and gains Self-Knowledge, he attains the full Bliss of Brahman before death. His mind has transcended the horizon of the finite and become identical with the Consciousness of Being.

The experience of deep sleep, which is free from desires, fears, and evils, is not a permanent realization. A man loses it on awakening, whereupon he returns to the world of the pairs of opposites. Through the practice of spiritual discipline, however, one can attain the Knowledge of Brahman permanently and enjoy without interruption that superlative Bliss.

### SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION ON NIRGUNA BRAHMAN

We have tried above to indicate something of the nature of Nirguna Brahman, the Unconditioned Brahman or Pure Consciousness, as discussed in the Upanishads. It is a negation of all attributes and relations. It is beyond time, space, and causality. Though It is spaceless, yet without It space could not exist; though It is timeless, yet without It time could not exist; though It is causeless, yet without It the universe, bound by the law of cause and effect, could not exist. Only if one admits the existence of Nirguna Brahman as an unchanging substratum can one understand proximity in space, succession in time, and the interdependence in the chain of causality. Without the unchanging white screen, one cannot relate in time or space the disjointed pictures in a cinema film. No description of It is possible except by the denial of all empirical attributes, definitions, and relations: *Neti, neti*—"Not this, not this."

Obviously Nirguna Brahman cannot be worshipped, prayed to, or meditated upon. No relationship whatsoever can be established with It. Yet It is not altogether detached; for It is the very foundation of relative existence. It is "the setu (dike) that keeps asunder these worlds to prevent their clashing together. This setu neither day nor night crosses, nor old age, nor death, nor suffering." It is the intangible Unity

that pervades all relative existence and gives a strong metaphysical foundation to fellowship, love, unselfishness, and other ethical disciplines. Being the immortal Essence of every man, It compels us to show respect to all, in spite of their illusory masks. Though It cannot be an object of formal devotion, yet It gives reality to the gods, being their inner substance, and thus binds together all worshippers in the common quest of Truth.

Nirguna Brahman is the basis of Saguna Brahman, or the Personal God, who is immanent in the universe and conditioned by *māyā*. Without compulsion from outside, Brahman imposes upon Itself, as it were, a limit and thus becomes manifest as God, soul, and world. Creation, preservation, and destruction are the activities of Saguna Brahman, mere waves on the surface of the ocean, which can never touch the serene depths of the attributeless Reality. It is Saguna Brahman by whom all things have been created, and by whom, after being created, they are sustained, and into whom, in the end, they are absorbed.

### SAGUNA BRAHMAN

When Brahman becomes conditioned by the *upādhi* of *māyā* and shrinks, as it were, because of that *māyā*, It is called Saguna Brahman, the conditioned Brahman. It must not, however, be forgotten that the conditioning is not real, but only apparent. *Māyā* is conceived of as Brahman's inscrutable power; in association with *māyā*, Brahman becomes the dynamic Creator of the universe. Rāmānuja describes the world-bewitching *māyā* as "a screen that hides the true nature of the Lord." When the curtain of *māyā* is rung down, the effulgence of Brahman seems to be dimmed; when it goes up, Brahman shines in Its fullest glory. "That non-dual God, who spontaneously covers Himself, like a spider, with the web produced from His *prakṛiti* . . ." <sup>99</sup> "Know *prakṛiti* (nature) to be *māyā* and the Great God its Lord." <sup>100</sup>

Like the ocean, Brahman appears to us in two aspects. Nirguna Brahman is without a wave or ripple. Saguna Brahman is the ocean agitated by the wind, covered by foaming waves. The tranquil ocean is sometimes agitated. Brahman, too, in essence inactive and quiescent, sometimes—as it were—is active and turbulent. But Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman are not two realities. The sea is the same, whether it is peaceful or agitated. A snake is the same, whether it remains

<sup>99</sup> *Śvet. Up.* VI. 10.

<sup>100</sup> *Śvet. Up.* IV. 10.

coiled up or wriggles about. Māyā, as we shall presently see, has no independent reality. It inheres in Brahman, as the power of Brahman. Fire's power of burning cannot be conceived of as in essence different from fire.

### MĀYĀ IN THE VEDAS

The doctrine of māyā can be traced to the Rig-Veda. The word actually occurs there and denotes a kind of magic: "Indra, through māyā, assumes various forms." In the Upanishadic philosophy this concept is applied to the sphere of metaphysics and thus enlarged. Without māyā such ideas as the unity of existence, the reality of Ātman, and the unreality of the universe independent of Ātman, as discussed in the Upanishads, become meaningless. It was, however, later Vedāntists, like Vyāsa, Gauḍapāda, Śankara, and Rāmānuja, who fully developed the doctrine and embodied it in their respective systems of thought.<sup>101</sup>

The Rig-Veda speaks of two orders of experience. The one is that of duality, or multiplicity, which is known to us in our everyday life through the sense-organs. The other is that of unity or non-duality, which is direct, immediate, and intuitive, that is to say, comprehended without the instrumentality of sense-organs or discursive reasoning. Multiplicity is said to be impermanent, finite, and circumscribed by a beginning and an end. It is depreciated by the Vedic seers as the source of grief, evil, and suffering. Non-duality, on the other hand, is eternal, infinite, immortal, and everlasting. It is identical with Absolute Reality (Sat), Consciousness (Chit), and Bliss (Ānandam). It is praised as the bestower of Bliss and as the Highest Good. The attainment of non-duality is the goal of spiritual evolution. Whatever reality the manifold phenomena possess is empirical and illusory, *vyāvahārika*; but non-duality is *pāramārthika*, absolute and immutable.

The Rig-Veda identifies non-duality with Reality, or the First Principle. "The Reality is one: sages call It by various names."<sup>102</sup> The *Chhāndogya Upanishad* describes multiplicity as a "mere matter of words." "The One besides which there is no other."<sup>103</sup> "The One, inserted into the everlasting nave, in which all living beings are

<sup>101</sup> See *Self-Knowledge*, by Swami Nikhilananda, p. 45 ff.

<sup>102</sup> *Ri. I.* clxiv. 46.

<sup>103</sup> *Ri. X.* cxxix. 2.

fixed.”<sup>104</sup> “This entire universe is the Purusha alone, both that which was and that which endures for the future.”<sup>105</sup>

The celebrated Hymn of Creation, known as the Nāsadiya Sukta,<sup>106</sup> indicates that the multiple names and forms of the visible universe, prior to the state of manifestation, were in a state of non-duality:

Then there was neither Aught nor Nought, no  
air nor sky beyond.  
What covered all? Where rested all? In watery  
gulf profound?  
Nor death was then, nor deathlessness, nor  
change of night and day.  
That One breathed calmly, self-sustained;  
nought else beyond It lay.  
Gloom hid in gloom existed first—one  
sea, eluding view.  
That One, a void in chaos wrapt, by  
inward fervour grew.<sup>107</sup>

The diversity or plurality that we encounter in our daily life is māyā, non-existent from the standpoint of Ultimate Reality.

### MĀYĀ IN THE UPANISHADS

The Upanishads reveal a systematic search, on the part of the seers, to discover the essential nature, or First Principle, of the universe. They came to the decision that the essence of things is not given in the objects as they present themselves to our senses in space and time. The entire aggregate of experience, external and internal, shows us merely how things appear to us, not how they are in themselves. Like the Greek philosophers Parmenides and Plato, who asserted the empirical reality to be a mere show, or shadow of reality, the Upanishads declared that the world is only māyā and that empirical knowledge does not give true Knowledge, or Vidyā, but belongs to the realm of ignorance, or avidyā. The Upanishadic philosophers, through a rigorous process of discrimination, analysed both the individual and the universe. All that does not belong to the inalienable substance of things they considered as non-Self and stripped away. The conclusion arrived at was that the “great,

<sup>104</sup> *Ri. X.* lxxxii. 6.

<sup>105</sup> *Ri. X.* xc. 2.

<sup>106</sup> *Ri. X.* cxxix.

<sup>107</sup> Surendranath Dasgupta, *Indian Idealism*, p. 4. Cambridge, London 1933.

omnipresent Ātman,"<sup>108</sup> which is "greater than heaven, space, and earth,"<sup>109</sup> is, at the same time, present—"small as a corn of rice,"<sup>110</sup> whole and undivided—in man's own self. The Universal Self is identical with the individual self.

The crux of the philosophy of Yājñavalkya, as presented in the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, is the sole reality of Ātman and the unreality of the universe independent of Ātman. "It is not for the sake of the husband, my dear, that the husband is loved, but for the sake of the Self that he is loved. . . By the realization of the Self, my dear, through hearing, reflection, and meditation, all this [world] is known."<sup>111</sup> As the notes of a drum, a conch-shell, or a lute have no existence in themselves and can be perceived only when the instrument that produces them is played, so all objects and relations in the universe are known by him who knows Ātman.<sup>112</sup> Ātman, or the Self, is the consciousness, the knowing subject, within us. All objects and relationships in the universe exist for us, and are known and loved by us, only in so far as they enter into our consciousness, which comprehends in itself all the objects and relationships, knowing nothing that is absolutely alien to itself. "As from a fire tiny sparks fly in all directions, so from this Self emanate all the organs and all the worlds, all gods, all beings."<sup>113</sup> "Just as all the spokes are fixed in the nave and the felloe of a chariot wheel, so are all beings, all gods, all worlds, all organs, and all these [individual selves] fixed in this Self."<sup>114</sup> If Ātman, the knowing subject in us, is the only reality, there can be no universe outside consciousness. Therefore the duality perceived in the universe, independent of Ātman, is *māyā*. This idea is reiterated in the Upanishads, again and again.<sup>115</sup>

A well-known prayer in the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* begs the Lord to lead the devotee from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from death to Immortality.<sup>116</sup> What is referred to here as

<sup>108</sup> *Tai. Br.* III. xii. 9. 7.

<sup>109</sup> *Śa. Br.* X. vi. 2.

<sup>110</sup> *Śa. Br.* X. vi. 2.

<sup>111</sup> *Br. Up.* II. iv. 5; compare p. 45.

<sup>112</sup> See *Br. Up.* II. iv. 7-9.

<sup>113</sup> *Br. Up.* II. i. 20.

<sup>114</sup> *Br. Up.* II. v. 15.

<sup>115</sup> See *Ka. Up.* II. i. 10-11; *Śvet. Up.* IV. 10; *Mu. Up.* I. i. 3; *Mat. Up.* VI. 24.

<sup>116</sup> *Br. Up.* I. iii. 28.

unreality, darkness, and death is duality, which is *māyā*. Non-duality, Ātman, alone is Reality, Light, and Immortality.

The *Īśa Upanishad* states that the "door of the Truth" is veiled with a "golden disc."<sup>117</sup> This veil must be removed that the seeker may behold the Truth. The figure of a veil or curtain has often been used by Vedāntic philosophers to describe *māyā*. But it must be understood that Brahman, or Ātman, is not to be sought *on the other side* of *māyā*; for there is no such thing as space beyond the sphere of *māyā*. Nor is It to be realized *after* the veil is removed; for beyond *māyā* there is no time. Nor, finally, is It to be known as the *cause* of the universe; for Brahman is beyond the causal law. Rather, Brahman becomes real to us to the extent that the universe, with its time, space, and causal principle, is realized as unreal. That is to say, Brahman becomes real to the extent that we can shake off from our minds the world of appearance.

The *Katha Upanishad* teaches that sages never find reality and certainty in the unrealities and uncertainties of the world.<sup>118</sup> Yājñavalkya exhorts the seekers of Brahman to renounce the longing for "children, wealth, and the heavenly world."<sup>119</sup> The *Mundaka Upanishad* states that when Brahman is realized "the fetters of the heart are broken and all doubts are resolved."<sup>120</sup>

### LATER PHILOSOPHERS

It has already been stated that the doctrine of *māyā* was developed in the Vedānta philosophy, in a systematic form, by later thinkers. The implications of the doctrine have been distorted and misunderstood by its critics, Indian as well as Western. They tell us that if one accepts the concept of *māyā* one must believe that the world is unreal and non-existent, that life on earth is full of suffering, and that Liberation consists in turning away from it; that human values are totally worthless, and that to seek happiness on earth is to pursue a will-o'-the-wisp.

Proper understanding of the philosophy of Non-dualistic Vedānta depends upon the recognition of the two standpoints from which Truth can be observed. The one is the relative standpoint; the other, the absolute. The former regards time, space, and causation as actual. From this standpoint the field of multiplicity is real. Good and evil exist, and

<sup>117</sup> *Īś. Up.* 15.

<sup>118</sup> See *Ka. Up.* II. i. 2.

<sup>119</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 22.

<sup>120</sup> *Mu. Up.* II. ii. 8.

so also pleasure and pain; the gods, heaven, and the after-life all are real. The Indo-Āryans sought celestial happiness by propitiating the deities through sacrifice, according to the directions of the Vedas. "This is the truth: The sacrificial works which were revealed to the rishis in the hymns have been described in many ways in the three Vedas. Practise them, being desirous to attain their true results. This is your path leading to the fruits of your works."<sup>121</sup>

Admitting the empirical reality of the individual ego and the manifold universe, the Vedic seers developed an elaborate system of theology, cosmology, ethics, spiritual disciplines, and methods of worship. Their division of Hindu society into four castes, and of the individual life into four stages, was based upon their recognition of the relative world. Their acknowledgement of the ideals of righteousness (dharma), wealth (artha), sense pleasure (kāma), and final Liberation (moksha) as worthy human pursuits (purushārtha) shows that they appreciated human values and were solicitous for human happiness. Had they considered the world to be non-existent or unreal, like a "barren woman's son," such injunctions as they laid down for these four ends of life would have been meaningless. Nevertheless, this world is not real from the standpoint of the Absolute, or Brahman; for duality disappears when the absolute Truth is known, and all the activities and thoughts associated with duality drop away. The teaching of Vedānta demonstrates the ultimate reality of Brahman. *Sarvam khalvidam Brahma*—"All that exists is Brahman."

Non-dualists describe the creation as the illusory superimposition (adhyāropa or vivarta), through māyā, of names and forms upon Brahman. They explain this subtle concept by means of various illustrations. One or two may be cited here. Karna, a hero of the *Mahābhārata*, was a son of Kunti, born before her marriage. In order to avoid a scandal, she put the baby in a pot and floated it down the river. The baby was picked up by a carpenter's wife named Rādhā and brought up by her as her own son. As a result Karna was known to himself and others as Rādhā-putra, Rādhā's son. Many years later his true parentage was revealed and he came to be called Kunti-putra, Kunti's son. Through ignorance Karna was given the epithet of Rādhā-putra. This is a case of illusory superimposition. There is also the story of the lion cub born in a flock of sheep. It bleated, ate grass, and regarded itself in all respects as a sheep. One day it was pounced upon by a lion from the

<sup>121</sup> *Mu. Up. I. ii. 1.*

forest and dragged to the water. There it was shown its reflection and a piece of meat was pressed into its mouth. Then suddenly the veil dropped off and the sheep-lion discovered itself to be a real lion. Through the power of *māyā*, or ignorance, names and forms are attributed to Brahman and the relative universe comes into existence. Through the negation (*apavāda*) of the illusory manifold, Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, is revealed again. The true nature of Brahman is not in the least affected by the superimposition of illusory notions.

Relativity is *māyā*. The fact that the One appears as the many, the Absolute as the relative, the Infinite as the finite, is *māyā*. The doctrine of *māyā* recognizes the reality of multiplicity from the relative standpoint—and simply states that the relationship of this relative reality with the Absolute cannot be described or known. How it can be that the infinite Brahman should appear as the finite world cannot be grasped by the finite mind; the very limitation of the mind precludes a satisfactory answer to this question. In fact, there is no relationship between the One and the many, since there can be a relationship only between two existing entities. The One and the many do not exist, however, in the same sense. When a man sees the One, he does not see the many; when he sees the non-dual Brahman, he does not see the universe. When anyone, seeing the manifold universe, establishes a relationship of any kind between it and the non-dual Brahman, the Non-dualists call that notion of relationship *māyā*. A mirage is *māyā*; so also its relationship with the desert. It is due to *māyā* that one sees a snake in place of a rope, water in the desert, and multiplicity in place of the non-dual Brahman. Vedāntists admit that for our practical life there is a difference between illusions, dreams, and the experiences of the waking state, yet insist that from the standpoint of the Absolute they are all equally unreal.

Sankara described *māyā* as the “power of the Lord”—*paramēśa śakti*. It is the inscrutable power of Brahman, resting in Brahman and having no existence independent of Brahman. This is illustrated by fire and its power of burning. *Māyā* makes possible the appearance of the manifold universe, and it endows names and forms with apparent reality. Non-dualists ascribe creation, preservation, and destruction to Saguna Brahman, or Brahman associated with *māyā*. Sadānanda defines *māyā* as “something positive, though intangible, which cannot be described either as being or as non-being, which is made of three *gunas*, and



which is antagonistic to Knowledge."<sup>122</sup> Māyā and also its effect, the universe, have a positive existence and cannot be called unreal, like the "horns of a hare." They are seen to exist from the relative standpoint but are non-existent from the standpoint of Brahman. Māyā and its manifestations disappear with the dawn of the Knowledge of Brahman.

Māyā consists of three *gunas*, namely, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The word *guna* is generally translated—though incorrectly—as "quality." Essentially the *gunas* are the very substance of māyā. Everything in nature consists of these three *gunas*, though in varying degrees. *Rajas* and *tamas* have opposing characteristics, while *sattva* strikes the balance between the two. The principal trait of *rajas* is energy, which is responsible for the "primal flow of activity"; the power of *rajas* moves the universe. *Tamas* is lassitude, dullness, inertia, and stupidity; while *sattva*, which is characterized by harmony, is manifest, on the human level, in such spiritual virtues as tranquillity, self-control, and contentment.

The Upanishads mention the three *gunas*: "The one she-goat—red, white, and black—casts many young ones, which are fashioned like to her."<sup>123</sup> The *Chhândogya Upanishad*<sup>124</sup> states that everything in the universe consists of three elements; namely, heat, water, and food. There are present in all things—for instance, in fire, in the sun, in the moon, and in lightning—the red heat, the white water, and the black food. Śankara explains the passage thus: "In this verse, by the words red, white, and black are to be understood *rajas*, *sattva*, and *tamas*. The red is *rajas* (emotion), because it naturally makes red; the white is *sattva* (essentiality, goodness), because it naturally makes bright; the black is *tamas* (darkness), because it naturally darkens." The passage, "The she-goat . . . casts many young ones, which are fashioned like to her," means that all the effects of māyā also are constituted of the three *gunas*.

Māyā functions in the world through its two powers: the power of concealment and the power of projection. The former, as in the case of a sleeping person, obscures the knowledge of the observer; it conceals, as it were, the true nature of Brahman. Next the projecting power of māyā creates the universe and all the objects seen in it, just as, after

<sup>122</sup> *Vedāntasāra* 34.

<sup>123</sup> *Śvet. Up.* IV. 5.

<sup>124</sup> VI. iv. 1.

a man's consciousness is obscured by sleep, he begins to dream. In actuality, however, the two powers of *māyā* function practically simultaneously. Therefore Brahman, in association with *māyā*, may be called, as it were, the Creator or Projector of the universe.

It is through *māyā* that Brahman, which is the eternal Subject, becomes an object of knowledge. *Māyā* obscures the reality of Brahman: the Self, in reality ever free and infinite, regards Itself as a finite entity, bound to the world. Seeking Liberation, this finite self practises spiritual disciplines such as study of scripture, self-control, and concentration—all of which have their validity in the world of *māyā*—and at last realizes Brahman, its true infinite Self. This means that as the veil of *māyā* is destroyed, the everlasting Light of Brahman reveals Itself.

*Māyā*, *ajñāna* (ignorance), *avidyā* (nescience), and *prakṛiti* (nature) are practically synonymous. *Māyā* generally signifies the cosmic illusion on account of which Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, appears as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the universe. It is under the influence of *avidyā* that *Ātman*, or Pure Consciousness, appears as the *jīva*, or individual self. *Ajñāna* makes the Absolute appear as the relative, the One as the many. *Prakṛiti* is the stuff of matter, that out of which the universe is evolved. But Vedāntic writers do not always strictly maintain these distinctions.

### MODES OF MĀYĀ

There are two ways of looking at *māyā*, depending upon one's point of view. From the collective or cosmic point of view, *māyā* is one; from the individual point of view, it is many. To give an illustration: One can regard a number of trees from the collective standpoint and describe them as a wood, or one can regard a wood from the standpoint of the trees and describe it as a number of trees. Likewise Vedāntists speak of collective or cosmic *māyā* and of individual *māyā*. The cosmic *māyā* is associated with *Īśvara* (Saguna Brahman) and forms His *upādhi*; the individual *māyā* limits the *jīva*, or individual soul, and becomes its *upādhi*. *Māyā*, both in its cosmic and in its individual aspect, hides the true nature of Brahman. Thus it becomes the *upādhi*, or limiting adjunct, of Brahman. But the infinite Brahman can never be limited; therefore this limitation is only apparent, and not real. The formless sky appears to possess sharp lines when viewed through the jagged peaks of a mountain. In association with *upādhis*, Brahman appears as stones, trees, birds, animals, men, gods, the Creator. When the *upādhi* is dis-

carded, the object formerly regarded as finite by the ignorant is realized as Brahman.

Brahman, that is to say, Saguna Brahman, is the cause of the universe. Creation, as already explained, is the superimposition of names and forms through *māyā*. Therefore Brahman, through association with *māyā*, appears to be endowed with such activities as creation, preservation, and destruction, and such attributes as omniscience, omnipotence, and lordship. Brahman uses *māyā* as the material of creation; that is to say, It creates the universe and its various objects out of *māyā*. *Māyā* has no existence independent of the Lord; therefore, from the standpoint of *māyā*, Brahman is the material cause of the universe. But, as Pure Consciousness, It is the efficient cause. This causal relation is often explained by the illustration of the spider and its web. When the spider wants to weave a web, it uses the silk which belongs to it and without which it cannot weave. Therefore the spider, as a conscious creature, is the efficient cause of the web, while from the standpoint of the silk it is the material cause. It must be remembered, however, that no causal relationship, in the usual sense of the term, can exist between Pure Brahman, or the Absolute, and the universe of names and forms.

The first element to evolve from Saguna Brahman is *ākāśa*, which is usually translated as "space" or "sky," and sometimes as "ether." The creation, or evolution, of *ākāśa* really means that Brahman, in association with *māyā*, appears as *ākāśa*. From *ākāśa* evolves air (*vāyu*); that is to say, Brahman, in association with *māyā*, appearing as *ākāśa*, further appears as air. From air evolves fire (*agni*); from fire, water (*ap*); from water, earth (*prithivi*). The five elements thus evolved are not the gross elements that we see, but they are subtle, rudimentary, and unmixed. Out of these subtle elements are produced the subtle bodies of all created beings and also the gross elements. The subtle body consists of the organs of perception, the organs of action, the *prāṇas*, the mind, and the *buddhi*. From the gross elements is produced the gross universe, with all the various physical objects contained therein. Both the totality of the subtle bodies and the gross universe are *upādhis* of Brahman and appear to limit It. In association with them, Pure Consciousness descends, as it were, into the realm of relativity and is known by such epithets as *Hiranyagarbha* and *Virāt*.

### ASPECTS OF SAGUNA BRAHMAN

When Vedānta speaks of Brahman as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer, it refers to Saguna, not Nirguna, Brahman. "That whence

these beings are born, That by which, when born, they live, That into which they enter at death—try to know That. That is Brahman.”<sup>125</sup> The creation does not exhaust the whole of Brahman; as we have seen, He is transcendent as well. Some Vedāntists associate Sat (Reality), Chit (Consciousness), and Ānandam (Bliss) with Saguna Brahman and give Him, not Nirguna Brahman, the name of Sachchidānanda.

With reference to His three activities of creation, preservation, and destruction, Saguna Brahman is known, respectively, as Brahmā, Vishnu, and Rudra, or Śiva. These form the Trimurti, the Trinity of Hinduism. The influence of rajas is seen in creation, of sattva in preservation, and of tamas in destruction. Kālidāsa, the great Hindu dramatist writes: “That which, before creation, is the non-dual Brahman becomes subject to māyā and assumes, in association with the three upādhis, the forms of Brahmā, Vishnu, and Śiva.”

Nirguna Brahman, as already remarked, cannot be the object of prayer or meditation, but Saguna Brahman can. “By the yogins He is realized through worship.”<sup>126</sup> “It is seen by subtle seers through their one-pointed and subtle intellects.”<sup>127</sup> “A calm person, wishing for Immortality, beholds the Inner Self with his eyes closed.”<sup>128</sup>

Many sublime passages are found in the Upanishads and other writings of the Hindu seers, describing the glories of Saguna Brahman:

“Grasping without hands, hasting without feet, He sees without eyes, He hears without ears. He knows what can be known, but no one knows Him. They call Him the first, the great Person.”<sup>129</sup>

“He is the Lord of all; He is the knower of all; He is the controller within; He is the source of all; and He is that from which all things originate and in which they finally disappear.”<sup>130</sup>

“It is the Controller of all, the Lord of all, the Ruler of all. It does not become better through good work or worse through bad work.”<sup>131</sup>

“He is the fountain of all blessed qualities and the consummation of such divine attributes as power, strength, glory, knowledge, and virility. By a fraction of His power He upholds all beings. He is the

<sup>125</sup> *Tat. Up.* III. 1.

<sup>126</sup> *Br. Su.* III. ii. 24.

<sup>127</sup> *Ka. Up.* I. iii. 12.

<sup>128</sup> *Ka. Up.* II. i. 1.

<sup>129</sup> *Śvet. Up.* III. 19.

<sup>130</sup> *Mā. Up.* 6.

<sup>131</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 22.

Supreme Lord, greater than the Great, and free from the least trace of suffering."<sup>132</sup>

"Everywhere are His eyes, everywhere is His mouth, everywhere are His arms, everywhere His feet. He has endowed men with arms, and birds with wings. He is the Creator of earth and heaven. He is one and without a second."<sup>133</sup>

"Devoid of senses, yet reflecting the qualities of all the senses, He is the Lord of all and the Ruler of all; He is the great refuge of all."<sup>134</sup>

"He is above the World Tree and beyond time; He is the Other from whom this world proceeds and around whom it moves. The giver of virtue, the remover of evil, the Lord of powers—know Him in your own self as the immortal Abode of all.

"He who is the supreme Lord of lords, the supreme Deity of deities, the supreme Ruler of rulers—Him let us know as God, adorable and paramount, the Lord of the world.

"Neither body nor organ is found in Him. There is not seen His equal or His superior. His exalted powers are innate and various: they are knowledge, will, and action."<sup>135</sup>

Saguna Brahman was later worshipped under various personifications—as Śiva, Vishnu, Rāma, and so on, the ideal deities (*ishta devatās*) of various Hindu sects. In the Upanishads He is described as Maheśvara, the Great Lord, and also as Īśa, Īśāna, and Īśvara—all meaning the Lord.

### ĪŚVARA (THE LORD)

Saguna Brahman is called Īśvara because He is all-powerful, the Lord of all, the Ruler of the entire universe. "He, the Lord, the bestower of blessings, the adorable God."<sup>136</sup> "He rules over all two-footed and four-footed beings."<sup>137</sup> "He rules this world eternally; for no one else is able to rule it."<sup>138</sup> "And that Prāṇa, indeed, is the Self of the conscious self (*Prajñātmā*), blessed, imperishable, and immortal. He does not increase

<sup>132</sup> Adapted from a quotation from *Smṛiti* in Rāmānuja's *Commentary on Brahma Sūtras* III. ii. 11.

<sup>133</sup> *Śvet. Up.* III. 3.

<sup>134</sup> *Śvet. Up.* III. 17.

<sup>135</sup> *Śvet. Up.* VI. 6-8.

<sup>136</sup> *Śvet. Up.* IV. 11.

<sup>137</sup> *Śvet. Up.* IV. 13.

<sup>138</sup> *Śvet. Up.* VI. 17.

by a good action nor does He decrease by a bad action. He, indeed, makes the man whom He wishes to lead up from these worlds do a good deed; and He makes him whom He wishes to lead down from these worlds do a bad deed. And He is the Guardian of the world, He is the King of the world, He is the Lord of the universe—and He is my Self; thus let it be known, yea, thus let it be known.”<sup>139</sup>

He is the source of all powers. All created objects, and the all-powerful *māyā* as well, are under His control. “The non-dual Lord of *māyā* rules alone by His powers . . . There is one Rudra only—they do not allow a second—who rules all the worlds by His powers.”<sup>140</sup>

He is the Supreme Ruler of the universe. Under His control the sun, the moon, and the planets perform their allotted functions. Because of His power a moral order controls the universe as well as man's life. “Under the mighty rule of this Immutable, O Gārgi, the sun and moon are held in their positions; under the mighty rule of this Immutable, O Gārgi, heaven and earth maintain their positions; under the mighty rule of this Immutable, O Gārgi, moments, *muhurtas*, days and nights, fortnights, months, seasons, and years are held in their respective places. Under the mighty rule of this Immutable, some rivers flow eastward from the White Mountains; others, flowing westward, continue in that direction; and still others keep to other courses. Under the mighty rule of this Immutable, O Gārgi, men praise those that give, the gods depend upon the sacrificer, and the manes on independent offerings.”<sup>141</sup>

This Brahman can inspire great terror, “like a thunderbolt ready to be hurled.” “From terror of Him the wind blows; from terror of Him the sun rises; from terror of Him fire, Indra, and death perform their respective duties.”<sup>142</sup> He alone is the source of all powers. Wherever one sees a manifestation of power, whether on earth or in heaven, it is all from Brahman. Ajātaśatru told the proud Bālāki that the power which animates the sun, the moon, lightning, the five elements, and other objects belongs to Brahman, who alone works through them and who alone is to be known.<sup>143</sup> The different gods, the powerful cosmic forces, are His manifestations through *māyā*. They are entirely dependent upon Him. How they become powerless unless sustained by Brahman

<sup>139</sup> *Kau. Up.* III. 8.

<sup>140</sup> *Śvet. Up.* III. 1-2.

<sup>141</sup> *Br. Up.* III. viii. 9.

<sup>142</sup> *Tat. Up.* II. 8.

<sup>143</sup> See *Kau. Up.* IV. 3 ff.

is described in the third chapter of the *Kena Upanishad*. Fire, we read there, is unable to burn a wisp of straw, and the wind unable to blow it, without the consent of Brahman.

Two things are implied when it is declared that Brahman is the Ruler of the universe. First, He maintains all things in their proper places and prevents them from clashing with one another. This is the sense in which Brahman is compared to a setu, a dike, which separates one body of water from another. Second, as the Ruler of the universe He guides the activities of all things. He is therefore called Antaryāmin, the Inner Ruler. "He is the Lord of all; He is the knower of all; He is the controller within."<sup>144</sup> The sun, moon, and stars follow His behest and the gods bow before His power; for Brahman is the Inner Ruler of all things.

Brahman as Antaryāmin has been elaborately described in the seventh section of the third chapter of the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*. "He who inhabits the earth, but is within it, whom the earth does not know, whose body is the earth, and who controls the earth from within, is the Internal Ruler, your own immortal Self."<sup>145</sup> What is true of the earth is also true, as one learns from the continued repetition of the same formula, of water, fire, the atmosphere, the wind, the sky, the sun, and other objects. All these are bodies of Brahman, who dwells within them but is distinct from them, whom they do not know, and yet who rules them all from within. It is the power of Brahman which is behind the activities of gods, of men, and of nature. All reflect His glory. Their very life is but the throb of that Eternal Life. "This Self . . . is the Ruler of all beings and the King of all beings."

### BRAHMAN AS VIDHĀTĀ (PROVIDENCE)

The seers of the Upanishads felt the necessity of a Personal God as an important factor in man's spiritual development. A man attached to the body, and influenced by love and hate, cannot meditate on the Impersonal Absolute. For his benefit, therefore, the Upanishads describe Saguna Brahman as the Providence who determines the course of the universe. We have already seen that Saguna Brahman is compared to a dike—"so that these worlds may not be confounded. Day and night do not pass that dike, nor old age, death, and grief."<sup>146</sup> "The Seer,

<sup>144</sup> *Mā. Up.* 6.

<sup>145</sup> *Br. Up.* III. vii. 3.

<sup>146</sup> *Chh. Up.* VIII. iv. 1.

omniscient, transcendent, and uncreated, He has duly allotted to the eternal World-Creators their respective duties."<sup>147</sup>

The *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad*, with its theistic inclination, contains many passages depicting this aspect of Brahman:

"The source of all, who determines the gunas, who brings to maturity whatever can be ripened, and who engages the gunas in their respective functions—over the whole world rules the One."<sup>148</sup>

"Watching over all works, dwelling in all things."<sup>149</sup>

"The one who, Himself without colour (differentiation), by the manifold application of His power produces [at the time of creation] many colours according to His hidden purpose, and in whom the whole universe, during its continuance, subsists, and in the end dissolves—He is the Lord. May He endow us with right intellect."<sup>150</sup>

Under the supervision of the Lord good and evil produce their respective results. "The Lord alone is the bringer of good and the destroyer of evil."<sup>151</sup> The *Kaushitaki Upanishad* says, as we have seen, that if the Lord wishes to lead a man up from these worlds, He makes him do a good deed, and that if the Lord wishes to lead him down from these worlds, He makes him do a bad deed.<sup>152</sup> This is not to be confused with the doctrine of predestination. The text only means that no action, good or bad, is possible without the power of the Lord. Brahman is like a light: with the help of it a good man performs righteous action, an evil man the reverse, but the light is impartial, though without it no action can be performed. Man reaps the result of his own action. He chooses a good or an evil action according to his inner tendencies created by his past works.

Brahman is described as the "Refuge of love" (*Sanjatvāma*): all love goes toward Him. He is also called the "Lord of brightness, for He shines in all worlds."<sup>153</sup>

## THE IMMANENT AND THE TRANSCENDENT BRAHMAN

It has already been stated that Brahman, without any external compulsion, assumes the upādhi of māyā and appears as the universe

<sup>147</sup> *Iś. Up.* 8.

<sup>148</sup> *Śvet. Up.* V. 5.

<sup>149</sup> *Śvet. Up.* VI. 11.

<sup>150</sup> *Śvet. Up.* IV. 1.

<sup>151</sup> *Śvet. Up.* VI. 6.

<sup>152</sup> *III.* 8.

<sup>153</sup> *Chh. Up.* IV. xv. 2, 4.



and its Creator. Thus He becomes immanent in the universe, from the relative standpoint, even though from the standpoint of Pure Consciousness the universe of names and forms does not exist. The Upanishads contain descriptions of both these aspects of Brahman.

The Immanent Brahman dwells in the universe and is to be sought therein. "He wished: May I be many, may I grow forth. Accordingly He practised austerity in the form of intense meditation. After He had thus practised austerity, He created all—whatever there is. Having created it, He entered into it."<sup>154</sup> "In the beginning, Prajāpati (the Creator) stood alone. He had no happiness when alone. Through meditation He brought into existence many creatures. He looked on them and saw they were without understanding, like a lifeless post, like a stone. He had no happiness. He thought: 'I shall enter within, that they may awake.' Making Himself like air, He entered within."<sup>155</sup>

The Bhagavad Gītā says that the Lord uses His lower nature to project material forms, and then through His higher nature enters into them and animates them. We read in the Upanishad that, having entered the world, He becomes covered by it like a spider by its web. "May that non-dual God, who spontaneously covers Himself, like a spider, with the web produced from His prakṛiti, grant us entrance into Brahman!"<sup>156</sup> The Lord has saturated the universe through and through. "This Self has entered into these bodies up to the tips of the fingernails—as a razor may be put in its case, or as fire, which sustains the world, is contained in its source (firewood)."<sup>157</sup> He is lost, as it were, in the universe, as when "a lump of salt, dropped into water, dissolves in the water, so that no one is able to grasp it."<sup>158</sup> But just as where-soever one tastes the water, it tastes salt, so also Brahman is to be felt everywhere in the universe as life and consciousness. The *Īśa Upanishad* begins with the exhortation that the whole universe "should be covered with the Lord."

The Upanishadic passages describing the Immanent Brahman show a pantheistic trend of thought. Brahman has become the universe, like milk transformed into curds, or clouds into rainwater. But does Brahman exhaust Himself in the universe? The texts contain passages supporting realism, theism, and pantheism, according to the different

<sup>154</sup> *Tat. Up.* II. 6.

<sup>155</sup> *Mai. Up.* II. 6.

<sup>156</sup> *Śvet. Up.* VI. 10.

<sup>157</sup> *Br. Up.* I. iv. 7.

<sup>158</sup> *Br. Up.* II. iv. 12.

stages of an aspirant's understanding; but the fundamental thought that runs through the whole body of the Upanishads is the *sole reality* of Brahman, or Ātman. Even when the reality of the universe is conceded, the purpose of stressing this reality is to maintain that the manifold world is not different from Brahman. But the reality of the dual universe, independent of Brahman, is denied when it is reiterated that with the Knowledge of Brahman everything is known. What the wise see as the non-dual Reality, the unilluminated, on account of māyā, see as the manifold universe. Therefore, though perceived to be immanent, Brahman remains transcendent. "It is inside all this and It is outside all this."<sup>159</sup> "He moves about, having entered all beings; He has become the Lord of all beings. He is the Self within and without; yea, within and without."<sup>160</sup> The Rig-Veda states that Brahman covers the whole universe and yet transcends it by the measure of "ten fingers." The same idea is expressed in the Upanishads as well.<sup>161</sup> In the Bhagavad Gītā the Lord declares that He sustains this universe with only a fraction of Himself.

The *Katha Upanishad* very clearly describes both the immanent and the transcendent aspect of Brahman:

"As the same non-dual fire, after it has entered the world, becomes different according to whatever it burns, so also the same non-dual Ātman, dwelling in all beings, becomes different according to whatever It enters. And It exists also without.

"As the same non-dual air, after it has entered the world, becomes different according to whatever it enters, so also the same non-dual Ātman, dwelling in all beings, becomes different according to whatever It enters. And It exists also without.

"As the sun, which helps all eyes to see, is not affected by the blemishes of the eyes or of the external things revealed by it, so also the one Ātman, dwelling in all beings, is never contaminated by the misery of the world, being outside it."<sup>162</sup>

The universe, like a mirage, is falsely superimposed on Brahman through māyā. Brahman, a homogeneous mass of Consciousness (*chaitanyaghana*), is partless, yet is described as endowed with parts, as it were, for the comprehension of beginners. Thus, though immanent in the universe, Brahman remains, in essence, transcendent. To Him this

<sup>159</sup> *Is. Up.* 5.

<sup>160</sup> *Mat. Up.* V. 2.

<sup>161</sup> *Chh. Up.* III. xii. 6; *Mat. Up.* VII. 11.

<sup>162</sup> *Ka. Up.* II. ii. 9-11.

vast universe is but a little thing. One beam of His light illumines it. A fraction of His power creates, preserves, and destroys it. The manifestation and non-manifestation of the universe proceed from Him without any effort whatsoever on His part—like a man's breathing out and breathing in. "They are like the breath of this [Supreme Self]."<sup>163</sup>

### BRAHMAN: CREATOR, PRESERVER, AND DESTROYER OF THE UNIVERSE

The very definition of Brahman (Saguna Brahman is understood) in the *Vedānta Sūtras* is, as we have stated: *Janmādasya yatah* (*janma-ādi-asya yatah*)—"Whence is the origin, continuance, and dissolution of the universe." The *Taittiriya Upanishad* puts it this way: "That whence these beings are born, That by which, when born, they live, That into which at death they enter—try to know That. That is Brahman."<sup>164</sup> The *Chhāndogya Upanishad* reveals "Tajjalān" as a secret name of Brahman by which He should be worshipped.<sup>165</sup> The meaning of the formula is this: From this (*tad*) Brahman the universe has arisen (*ja*). So, on the reverse path to that by which it has arisen, it disappears (*li*) into this identical Brahman. And in the same way, finally, it is Brahman in whom the universe, after it is created, breathes (*an*), lives, and moves. Therefore in the three periods (past, present, and future) the universe is not distinct from Brahman. The formula succinctly summarizes the principal attributes of Brahman as Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the universe. In the same *Upanishad*<sup>166</sup> the teacher, wishing to explain the root of the universe, asks the pupil to bring a fruit of the banyan tree.

"Here is one, sir."

"Break it."

"It is broken, sir."

"What do you see there?"

"The seeds, almost infinitesimal."

"Break one of them."

"It is broken, sir."

"What do you see there?"

"Not anything, sir."

The teacher then gives the instruction: "My son, that subtle essence

<sup>163</sup> *Br. Up.* II. iv. 10.

<sup>164</sup> *Tai. Up.* III. 1.

<sup>165</sup> *Chh. Up.* III. xiv. 1.

<sup>166</sup> *Chh. Up.* VI. xii.

which you do not perceive there—in that very essence this great banyan exists. Believe it, my son. That which is the subtle essence—in It all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self. And thou, O Śvetaketu, art It.”

The *Katha Upanishad* describes the universe as the eternal *Āśvattha* tree, rooted in Brahman, with its shoots spreading downward.<sup>187</sup>

Brahman alone, as the inmost essence of things, preserves them all. “He is the sun dwelling in the bright heavens. He is the air dwelling in the interspace. He is the fire dwelling on earth. He is the guest dwelling in the house. He dwells in men, in the gods, in truth, in the sky. He is born in the water, on earth, in the sacrifice, on the mountains. He is the True and the Great.”<sup>188</sup> “He, indeed, is the Deva who pervades all regions: He is the first-born [as *Hiranyagarbha*] and He is the womb. He has been born and He will be born. He stands behind all persons, looking everywhere. The God who is in fire, the God who is in water, the God who has entered into the whole world, the God who is in plants, the God who is in trees—adoration be to that God, adoration!”<sup>189</sup> We have seen that Brahman is described in the *Bṛihad-āraṇyaka Upanishad* as a *setu*, which means both bridge and dike. As bridge He connects one being with another and the present world with the future world; as dike He keeps asunder these worlds to prevent their clashing together. On account of Him there is no confusion in the world of diversity. Everything moves along its allotted path.

Brahman is the womb into which the universe again returns. Hence He is called the Destroyer. The Vedāntists have formulated a doctrine of cycles, by which is described the unceasing process of creation and destruction, or, more precisely, manifestation and non-manifestation. The actions of one's present life find their recompense in the next life. Again, the present life is the result of the preceding one. Therefore each existence presupposes an earlier one and consequently no existence can be the first. The rebirth of the soul (*jīva*) has been going on from all eternity; and so *samsāra*, or the relative universe, is without beginning. Indeed, it is absurd to speak of the beginning of a causal chain. When the Upanishads speak of a beginning or creation, they mean, really, the beginning of the present cycle. From all eternity, the universe has been going periodically into a state of non-manifestation

<sup>187</sup> *Ka. Up.* II. iii. 1.

<sup>188</sup> *Ka. Up.* II. ii. 2.

<sup>189</sup> *Śvet. Up.* II. 16-17.

and then again returning into the manifest state of names and forms. At the conclusion of each cycle the universe and all those living beings that have not been liberated from *māyā* return to Brahman, that is to say, to His *prakṛiti*, or primordial nature.

"At the end of a cycle all beings, O Son of Kuntī, enter into My *prakṛiti*, and at the beginning of a cycle I generate them again."<sup>170</sup> The *Rig-Veda* says: "The Lord creates in this cycle the sun and moon as they existed in the previous cycle." So creation is a never-ending process, following an invariable, monotonous pattern. It has been compared to the breathing out and in of the Cosmic Person, reposing on the Ocean of the Great Cause. "In Him the universe is interwoven—whatever moves or is motionless; in Him everything disappears, like bubbles in the ocean. In Him the living creatures of the universe, emptying themselves, become invisible; they disappear and then come to light again like bubbles rising to the surface." "For there is one Rudra only—they do not allow a second—who rules all the worlds by His powers. He stands behind all persons, and after having created all the worlds, He, the Protector, rolls them all up at the end of time."<sup>171</sup>

"He, like *ākāśa*, is everywhere, and at the destruction of the universe He alone is awake. From *ākāśa*, again, He rouses all this world."<sup>172</sup> "In Me the universe had its origin, in Me alone the whole subsists, in Me it is lost: this Brahman, the Limitless—It is I Myself."<sup>173</sup>

The individual self liberated from *māyā* merges in Brahman. The self is always Brahman—before its manifestation as the individual soul and also during the state of embodiment. When it knows its true nature, knowingly it becomes Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, again.

### THE COSMIC SOUL

Some of the oft-repeated epithets of Saguna Brahman in the Upanishads are *Brahmā*, *Hiranyagarbha*, *Virāt*, *Prāna*, and *Sutrātmā*. They all in a general way denote the World Soul, the Cosmic Soul, the Cosmic Mind, or the Cosmic Person. According to later Vedāntists, when the Absolute, or Pure Consciousness, becomes conditioned by the *upādhi* of the gross universe, It is called *Virāt*; when conditioned by that of the subtle universe, It is called *Hiranyagarbha*; and when

<sup>170</sup> *B. G. IX. 7.*

<sup>171</sup> *Śvet. Up. III. 2.*

<sup>172</sup> *Mai. Up. VI. 17.*

<sup>173</sup> *Kai. Up. 19.*

conditioned by that of the causal universe, It is called *Prāna* or *Sutrātmā*. In the writings of Vedāntists, however, these terms are often interchanged. *Hiranyagarbha*, or *Brahmā*, is mentioned in the *Rig-Veda* as the first-born when Brahman becomes conditioned by *māyā*. He is the first entity endowed with the consciousness of individuality. "Who creates the God *Brahmā* in the beginning and who communicates to Him the *Vedas* also."<sup>174</sup> He is called *Brahmā* (masculine) and is differentiated from Brahman (neuter). He is the "Golden Egg," containing in potential form the future manifold universe. In contrast with the *jiva*, the individualized consciousness, who is conscious only of his own soul, *Brahmā* is conscious of all souls. The totality of all beings is His individuality (*sarvābhimāni*).

It is implicit in the Upanishadic teachings that the entire objective universe is possible only in so far as it is sustained by a knowing subject. Though this knowing subject is manifested in all individual subjects, yet it is not, by any means, identified with them. Individual subjects come into existence and die, but the universe continues to exist. Who, then, is its perceiver or knower? It is *Brahmā*, or *Hiranyagarbha*, who is the eternal Knowing Subject by which the universe is sustained. All living beings respond in more or less like manner to the outside world, and experience the same sensations, because their individual minds are controlled by the cosmic mind of *Brahmā*, and also because they are part and parcel of Him. When, at the end of a cycle, *Brahmā* dies, the universe dies with Him. Though identified with all minds and the entire universe, *Brahmā* is also described as the presiding deity or governor of a special plane, or heaven, known as *Brahmaloka*, the Plane of *Brahmā*. This is the most exalted realm in the relative universe and may be compared, in a general way, to the heaven of the dualistic religions. Those fortunate mortals who, while living on earth, worship *Saguna Brahman* with whole-souled devotion, meditating on their identity with Him, proceed after death to *Brahmaloka*, where they dwell absorbed in contemplation of *Saguna Brahman*. There they experience uninterrupted peace and blessedness and take part in the cosmic life of *Brahmā*. They are not affected by any of the shortcomings of the other relative planes, such as disease, pain, thirst, or hunger. These inhabitants of *Brahmaloka* do not come back to earth, but at the end of the cycle become absorbed, together with *Brahmā*, in the attributeless Brahman and thus attain final Liberation. This is described

<sup>174</sup> *Śvet. Up.* VI. 18.

as *kramamukti*, or Liberation attained by stages. There is another class of devotees who also attain to *Brahmaloka* after death but come back to earth for a new embodiment after reaping the results of their meritorious actions. They are those who have performed one hundred Horse-sacrifices and also those who have lived, according to the scriptural injunctions, the life of a *brahmachāri* until their death.

The path to *Brahmaloka* lies through what has been described in the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā* (VIII. 24.) as the *Devayāna*, or Way of the Gods, which is characterized by various luminous stages, such as flame, day, the bright fortnight of the moon, the bright half of the year (when the sun travels northward), the sun, and lightning. It is also called the Northern Path. There is another path, called the *Pitriyāna*, the Way of the Fathers, or the Southern Path, which leads to *Chandraloka*, the Plane of the Moon. To it go, after death, those householders who have performed their daily obligatory duties and worshipped the gods, following the scriptural rules, with a view to enjoying the results of their meritorious actions in this lower heaven. The path leading to *Chandraloka* is characterized by dark stages, such as smoke and not flame, night and not day, the dark fortnight of the moon and not the bright, and the months of winter and not of summer. After enjoying the results of their meritorious actions in this lower heaven, souls come back to earth and are born as ordinary mortals. What happens to those who have attained complete Self-Knowledge while living here on earth, and also to those who have committed very vile actions, will be discussed later.<sup>175</sup>

Brahman's universal form, known as *Virāt*, has been described in sublime language in the Hindu scriptures. "Whence the sun rises and whither it goes to set, in whom all the *devas* are contained, and whom none can ever pass beyond."<sup>176</sup> "From whom all works, all desires, all odours and tastes, proceed—He who embraces all this, who never speaks and is never surprised."<sup>177</sup> The universe is His body.

A hymn of the *Rig-Veda* addressed to the *Purusha* (the Cosmic Person) describes His universal form in the following manner: The *Purusha* has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, and a thousand feet. He covers the universe on all sides and transcends it "by the measure of ten fingers." All this—the past, the present, and the future—is

<sup>175</sup> See p. 104 and p. 99.

<sup>176</sup> *Ka. Up.* II. i. 9.

<sup>177</sup> *Chh. Up.* III. xiv. 2.

indeed the Purusha; He alone is the Lord of all, mortal and immortal. "Its hands and feet are everywhere; Its eyes and head are everywhere; Its ears are everywhere; It stands encompassing all in the world."<sup>178</sup> "The heavens are His head; the sun and moon, His eyes; the quarters, His ears; the revealed Vedas, His speech; the wind is His breath; the universe, His heart. From His feet is produced the earth. He is, indeed, the Inner Self of all beings."<sup>179</sup> This universal form comprises not only our earth and the galactic system to which it belongs, but all the fourteen worlds of Hindu mythology—the seven above and the seven below—and all the animate and inanimate creatures dwelling therein, including gods and angels, men and animals, birds and insects, trees, plants, shrubs, and creepers. This totality is the Lord's universal form.

### THE GREAT LORD (MAHEŚVARA)

The Upanishads sometimes describe Saguna Brahman as the "highest Supreme Lord of Lords, the Highest Deity of Deities, the Master of Masters."<sup>180</sup> "He has duly allotted to the eternal World-Creators their respective duties."<sup>181</sup> Who are these "eternal World-Creators"? The Upanishads certainly do not believe in many Gods or Ultimate Realities. Brahman is one and without a second. "To whom there is nothing superior, from whom there is nothing different, than whom there is nothing smaller or larger, who stands alone."<sup>182</sup> "Beyond the Purusha there is nothing: this is the end, the Supreme Goal."<sup>183</sup> Who, then, are these numerous Lords, and what is their relationship to the Supreme Lord? The answers to these questions have been elaborated in the Purāṇas but already indicated in the Upanishads. Let us try to understand the subject by the analogy of modern astronomy.

The Brahmānda, or Egg of Brahmā, described by the Hindu seers, may be likened, without pressing the comparison too far, to the solar system. The name is derived from its shape, which is oval, like an egg, or, more precisely, elliptical. There are, according to the rishis, innumerable Brahmāndas, which constantly appear and disappear in the Ocean of the Great Cause (Mahākāraṇa).

<sup>178</sup> *Śvet. Up.* III. 16.

<sup>179</sup> *Mu. Up.* II. i. 4.

<sup>180</sup> *Śvet. Up.* VI. 7.

<sup>181</sup> *Iś. Up.* 8.

<sup>182</sup> *Śvet. Up.* III. 9.

<sup>183</sup> *Ka. Up.* I. iii. 11.



The planets and their satellites, which revolve with the sun as their centre, constitute our solar system. The earth, which is a tiny speck in comparison with the sun, is one of the planets. The moon is a satellite of the earth. Other planets also have their satellites. These satellites move along their orbits with the planet as their centre; and the planets move with the sun as their centre. The ellipse which determines the boundary of the solar system may be called the sun's circumference.

Countless stars shine in the firmament of the night, and yet only a few of all that exist come within the ken even of the most powerful telescope. It takes many, many years for the light of a star,—travelling at the rate of one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles per second—to reach the earth. It is said that the light of some stars has not yet reached us. Each is a sun—most of them many times larger than our own sun. Probably many are the centres of their own solar systems, having their own planets and satellites. No one can count, or even estimate, the number of solar systems in the creation.

The earth supports life in various forms, and there is no reason to suppose that such life exists only here. The Hindu seers state that life is to be found—it may be in different forms—in other solar systems also; but such knowledge, of course, is beyond the verification of physical science as it is known to us at the present time.

The *Brahmānda* (Cosmic Egg) of the *Purāṇas* may be likened to a single solar system. Each *Brahmānda* has its own Lord, its Governor or Controller, who, needless to say, is a manifestation, in *māyā*, of Brahman, or the Absolute. This Lord, or *Īśvara*, has three aspects: as *Brahmā* He creates, as *Vishnu* He preserves, and as *Śiva* He destroys. These three form one Lord, or God, who is known by three different names according to His three functions. Since the *Brahmāndas* are without number, so too are the *Brahmās*, *Vishnus*, and *Śivas* without number. The *Purāṇa* says: "One may be able to count the number of sands on the seashore, but one cannot count the number of the *Brahmāndas* or the deities controlling them."

He who is the Lord of these countless deities is *Maheśvara*, or the Supreme Lord—*Saguna Brahman*. *Brahmās*, *Vishnus*, and *Śivas* are innumerable, but *Maheśvara* is one and without a second. Each *Īśvara* is the Lord of one *Brahmānda* alone; but *Maheśvara* is the Lord of all *Īśvaras* and also of the millions of *Brahmāndas*. "Endowed with infinite power, Brahman is the Lord of Lords." He is the Emperor, and

the *Íśvaras* are kings, more or less autonomous in their respective realms. Further, under each of the *Íśvaras* are many subsidiary deities performing various duties in the *Brahmānda*.

Thus there are innumerable *Brahmāndas* in the creation, each with its independent ruling Lord, and under Him, in each universe, many subsidiary deities. And at the head of all is *Maheśvara*, the King of Kings. *Maheśvara* is sometimes called the Eternal Lord (*Nitya Íśvara*); and *Íśvara*, sometimes, the Created Lord (*Janya Íśvara*). The latter is known also by the general name of *Brahmā*, whereas the former is *Saguna Brahman*. *Brahmā* is the first created being in the relative universe. "*Brahmā*, the Maker of the universe and the Preserver of the world, was the first among the *devas*."<sup>184</sup> "He who first creates *Brahmā* and delivers the *Vedas* to Him."<sup>185</sup> "The first-born, the offspring of austerity."<sup>186</sup> "*Brahmā* revealed the knowledge of the *Vedas* to *Hiranyagarbha*, *Hiranyagarbha* to *Manu*, and *Manu* to his offspring."<sup>187</sup>

Rudimentary matter, the first stage in the manifestation of the relative universe, was evolved from *Saguna Brahman* Himself. This matter is sometimes called the "primeval waters" (*ap*), the unmanifested *prakṛiti*. *Brahman* "saw *Hiranyagarbha* arise" from these waters.<sup>188</sup>

As we have noted above, the sun is the centre of a solar system, or *Brahmānda*. The Lord of the *Brahmānda* is described as dwelling in the sun. The *Upanishads* often describe Him as the "Person in the sun." "The Person that is seen in the sun—I am He, I am He indeed."<sup>189</sup> "O Nourisher, lone traveller of the sky! Controller! O Sun, Offspring of *Prajāpati*! Gather Your rays; withdraw Your light. I would see, through Your grace, that form of Yours which is the fairest. I am, indeed He, that *Purusha*, who dwells there."<sup>190</sup> This Person in the sun is sometimes called *Vishnu*, because He pervades all—the entire solar system. Here is a further description of the Deity: "Now that Person, bright as gold, who is seen within the sun, with golden beard

<sup>184</sup> *Mu. Up. I. i. 1.*

<sup>185</sup> *Śvet. Up. VI. 18.*

<sup>186</sup> *Ka. Up. II. i. 6.*

<sup>187</sup> *Chh. Up. III. xi. 4.*

<sup>188</sup> *Brahmā* is created from *prakṛiti*; He is not eternal. The Supreme *Brahman* alone is eternal.

<sup>189</sup> *Chh. Up. IV. xi. 1.*

<sup>190</sup> *Iś. Up. 16.*

and golden hair—golden altogether to the very tips of His nails . . .”<sup>191</sup>

Who is this Person dwelling in the sun; and why is the solar deity called a person? Śaṅkarāchārya, in his commentary on the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*,<sup>192</sup> states that He, Prajāpati, is like a person, being endowed with a head, hands, and other parts. He was the first to be created. The Prajāpati of the present cycle had practised meditation in a previous cycle and performed Vedic rites, with a view to occupying the position of the Lord in the next cycle. Others, too, had done the same, but among them all, He was the first to be freed from such obstacles as gross ignorance and attachment. What this means is this: that in the previous cycle many aspirants practised spiritual disciplines but did not attain complete Liberation because they still possessed traces of desire and attachment. Of these, the most advanced was reborn in the present cycle, as the Prajāpati of the Brahmānda, in which capacity He now enjoys great power and bliss. But this position of Brahmā must not be confused with the attainment of the Highest Good, or Liberation; for even He is said to be afflicted by fear and unhappiness. His life is impermanent, lasting for the duration of a Brahmānda. His position, though an exalted one, still belongs to the relative world. Only the courageous aspirant who can renounce the position of Brahmā, which is non-eternal, can attain the Highest Good.

To give a brief outline of this interpretation of the creation: In the beginning—that is to say, before the evolution of names and forms, time and space—Ātman, or Brahman, alone exists. Then It becomes conditioned by māyā, Its own inscrutable power. At that time Brahman is called Saguna Brahman—Maheśvara, or the Great Lord. The idea of creation arises in His mind. *Sa aikshata*—“He thought.” Then Brahman, on account of māyā, forgets, as it were, Its infinite nature and regards Itself as an individual entity. It says: “I am one; I shall be many.”

Three “moments” are to be distinguished in creation: First, the Supreme Brahman accepts the limitation of māyā and becomes Maheśvara. Second, the desire for creation arises in His mind. Third, He feels His loneliness and decides to multiply Himself. Then, with the help of māyā, He creates ākāśa, air, and the other elements.

Maheśvara, who is the Ruler of all the Brahmāndas, is thus the First Person in the creation. Hiranyagarbha, or Brahmā, who as a

<sup>191</sup> *Chh. Up.* I. vi. 6.

<sup>192</sup> *I.* iv. 1.

result of spiritual disciplines practised in a previous cycle, becomes the Ruler of a Brahmānda, is the Second Person. Though possessed of an individuality, He identifies Himself with the whole universe; He is described in the Vedas as endowed with innumerable heads, innumerable eyes, and innumerable feet. And the Godhead dwelling in every heart is the Third Person. He is Antaryāmin, or the Inner Guide.

### MICROCOSM AND MACROCOSM

One of the most significant symbols of Brahman, both Personal and Impersonal, is Aum, pronounced and often written Om.<sup>193</sup> "The goal which all the Vedas declare, which all austerities aim at, and which men desire when they lead the life of continence, I will tell you briefly: it is Om. This syllable Om is indeed Brahman. This syllable is the Highest. Whoso knows this syllable obtains whatever he desires. This is the best support; this is the highest support. Whoso knows this support is adored in the world of Brahmā."<sup>194</sup> The *Māndukya Upanishad* discusses Brahman through Om. "Om, the syllable, is all this."<sup>195</sup> Patanjali states in the *Yoga Sūtras*:<sup>196</sup> "Om is the signifying word of Īśvara."

The word as written in Sanskrit consists of three letters: A, U, and M. These are called the three quarters, or letters, of Om. There is a fourth quarter, denoted by the prolonged undifferentiated sound M, which comes at the end, as the word is pronounced. This is the symbol of Nirguna Brahman, or Pure Consciousness. "That which is partless, incomprehensible, non-dual, all bliss, and which brings about the cessation of the phenomenal world, is Om, the Fourth, and verily the same as Ātman. He who knows this merges his self in the Self."<sup>197</sup> The first three quarters, or letters, of Om apply to the relative universe. A, called Vaiśvānara, is the first quarter; it functions in the waking state. U, called Taijasa, is the second quarter; it functions in the dream state. And M, called Prājna, is the third quarter; it functions in the state of dreamless sleep. Vaiśvānara is the experiencer of the gross, Taijasa of the subtle, and Prājna of the causal.<sup>198</sup> The fourth

<sup>193</sup> To be pronounced as in *home*.

<sup>194</sup> *Ka. Up.* I. ii. 15-17.

<sup>195</sup> *Mā. Up.* 1.

<sup>196</sup> I. 27.

<sup>197</sup> *Mā. Up.* 12.

<sup>198</sup> See *Mā. Up.* VI; also *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā. I.* 1.

quarter—which in reality is indescribable in terms of relations, but is called the fourth only with reference to the other three—is Turiya, or Pure Consciousness, which permeates all the states and is also transcendent.

Let us now try to develop the meaning of what has been outlined in the two preceding paragraphs. All our relative experiences are included in the waking state, the dream state, and the state of deep sleep. In the waking state we experience, through the gross body and the sense-organs, the gross world. In dreams we experience subtle objects through mind, or the subtle body. The causal world we experience in dreamless sleep, when the mind and the sense-organs do not function. Yogins, even in the waking state, can experience the subtle and causal worlds, which have objective reality. One must use the gross body to experience the gross world, the subtle body to experience the subtle world, and the causal body to experience the causal world. Therefore, corresponding to the three worlds—the gross, the subtle, and the causal—there are three states, namely, waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, and also three bodies, namely, the gross, the subtle, and the causal. But it must not be forgotten that Consciousness is *Ātman*, which is always present in the three states and forms their substratum. When *Ātman* uses the gross body for the experience of the gross world, It is given the technical name of *Viśva*. When It uses the subtle body for the experience of the subtle world, It is called *Taijasa*. And when the same *Ātman* uses the causal body for the experience of the causal world, It is called *Prājña*. *Ātman* is one and without a second. It is Pure Brahman. It is bodiless. When associated with the three upādhis It is given three different names. Free from any upādhi, It is Brahman, the Absolute.

The above is a description of the microcosm, or individual soul. The same is true of the macrocosm, or totality of souls.

"This *Ātman* is Brahman."<sup>100</sup> As in the case of the individual soul, Brahman also functions in the relative universe in the three states, in association with three upādhis, and is known by three technical names. With reference to the gross upādhi, Brahman is called *Virāt*; with reference to the subtle upādhi, *Hiranyagarbha* or *Prajāpati*; and with reference to the causal upādhi, *Sutrātmā* or *Prāna*. But, as has already been stated, all these terms are often interchanged in the earlier Vedānta books.

<sup>100</sup> *Mā. Up.* 2.

There is no intrinsic difference between the microcosm and the macrocosm. A forest (macrocosm) is nothing but an aggregate of individual trees (microcosm). A lake (macrocosm) is an aggregate of small portions of water (microcosm). But both microcosm and macrocosm possess their own distinctive individuality. The macrocosm, though an aggregate of individual units, is not a mere abstraction. This can be better explained by the illustration of cells. A living body consists of innumerable cells, each of which possesses a distinctive individuality. The totality of cells, the body, has however its own independent individuality. Each cell has a distinct life and purpose of its own. It lives by extracting from its immediate environment what is necessary for its growth and nutrition. But this work has, for its end, the ultimate nutrition and building-up of the whole body, of which each individual cell forms a very small, but necessary, distinct unit.

A gross living body consists of the aggregate of its living cells. Likewise, the aggregate of all gross individual bodies constitutes Virāt; the aggregate of all individual subtle bodies, Hiranyagarbha; and the aggregate of all causal bodies, Sutrātmā, or Prāṇa. The gross upādhi consists of the totality of gross bodies; in other words, the instrument through which Brahman functions in the gross world is the totality of the gross bodies. The subtle upādhi consists of the totality of subtle bodies; in the subtle world Brahman's instrument is the totality of subtle bodies, or minds. The causal upādhi consists of the totality of causal bodies; when Brahman functions in the causal world, It uses the totality of causal bodies as Its instrument.

The subtle and causal bodies may also refer to advanced souls in different states of perfection. They are the media through which the higher attributes of the Lord, such as knowledge, power, love, purity, and compassion, find expression in the universe. The Lord may be likened to the centre, the very heart, of the universe, and the great souls, to the arteries that meet there. By them the life-blood is carried to all parts of the universe.

It has been stated before that the Lord, when associated with the upādhi of the causal bodies, is called Sutrātmā. The word means, literally, the "Thread Soul"—that is to say, the thread-like, subtle substance that joins together all the different individuals—men, gods, animals, and inorganic beings. It is like the protoplasmic substance which, by its minute threads, passing through the cell-walls, unites the

cells in a living organism. "It is He who pervades all."<sup>200</sup> "By Me, in My unmanifested form, are all things in this universe pervaded."<sup>201</sup>

All that has been stated above applies also in the case of Maheśvara, the Great Lord. He represents the totality of all Brahmās. These Brahmās sometimes are compared to mere bubbles that appear and disappear in the Ocean of the Great Cause. Each one of them is born, lives for a while, and ultimately dies. Even when one Brahmā with his Brahmaloка disappears, others continue to exist and function. The merging of one Brahmā into Maheśvara after his life-span is completed is called a partial dissolution (*khandapralaya*). The merging of all Brahmās, after uncountable ages, into Maheśvara, is called a great dissolution (*mahāpralaya*). Each destruction, partial or complete, is followed by a new creation. The systole and diastole of the cosmic heart never stops.

The Upanishads often say that only when a man feels dispassion for all forms of life, from the blade of grass to Brahmā, is he qualified to be a seeker of Liberation. From the standpoint of the Absolute, all manifestations are impermanent and transitory. Brahman alone is the immutable Witness of the births and deaths in the creation. And that Brahman dwells in each man's heart as his inmost Soul.

### SYNTHESIS

We have already spoken of the two aspects of Brahman: Nirguna and Saguna. Nirguna Brahman is characterized by an absence of all attributes. It is Pure Consciousness and the immutable foundation of the universe. Again, in association with māyā, Brahman appears as Saguna Brahman, which, from the standpoint of the Absolute, is mutable and impermanent. The knowledge of the former is called the Higher Knowledge, and that of the latter, the lower knowledge. The Higher Knowledge brings about immediate Liberation, resulting in the utter cessation of all suffering and the attainment of supreme Bliss. The lower knowledge leads to the realization of the position of Brahmā and thus paves the way for ultimate Liberation. It offers the highest happiness in the material world. But still it is not Immortality. The attainment of the Higher Knowledge, or *Parā Vidyā*, is the goal of the spiritual life. But the lower knowledge, or *aparā vidyā*, is not to be neglected or despised. As long as a man is conscious of the ego and

<sup>200</sup> *Iś. Up.* 8.

<sup>201</sup> *B. G. IX.* 4.

the outside world, and as long as he takes these to be real, so long must he cultivate this knowledge. The Bhagavad Gītā says that if a man who is identified with the body follows the way of the Unmanifest, he only courts misery. The *Mundaka Upanishad* exhorts the pupil to cultivate both the Higher Knowledge and the lower knowledge. "The fetters of the heart are broken, all doubts are resolved, and all works cease to bear fruit, when He is beheld who is both high and low."<sup>202</sup>

As we have seen above, Brahman, in association with māyā, becomes Maheśvara. His glories have been described in the Upanishads. He is the Ruler of all, the Controller of all, and the Inner Guide of all beings. The sun, moon, and stars obey His commands. Under His wise providence the seasons and years follow each other in orderly succession. He is the thunderbolt, ready to be hurled at transgressors of His laws—"He to whom brāhmins and kshatriyas are mere food, and death itself a condiment."<sup>203</sup> He covers the universe and also extends beyond.

This universal aspect of the Lord has been described in most vivid language in the eleventh chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā in Arjuna's hymn to Sri Krishna:

"I behold Thee with myriads of arms and bellies, with myriads of faces and eyes. I behold Thee, infinite in form, on every side, but I see not Thy end nor Thy middle nor Thy beginning, O Lord of the universe, O Universal Form! . . . Into Thee enter these hosts of gods, and some in fear extol Thee with folded hands. And bands of rishis and siddhas exclaim: 'May there be peace!' and praise Thee with splendid hymns." The Lord describes Himself in the Gītā as "mighty, world-destroying Time." This Form embodies the vast extent of creation, preservation, and destruction; past, present, and future; gods, men, animals, and inorganic things. One blest with the exalted vision beholds all this simultaneously and in one instant. Naturally mortal eyes become dazed with the manifestation of so much glory, power, and splendour. Arjuna, terrified by the spectacle, obtained peace of mind only when the Lord withdrew His effulgence and appeared before him again as the Personal God whom he had always loved and cherished in his heart.

There is another aspect of Saguna Brahman, which is tender, gentle,

<sup>202</sup> *Mu. Up.* II. ii. 8.

<sup>203</sup> *Ka. Up.* I. ii. 25.



and redemptive. "He is Bliss."<sup>204</sup> The *Chhāndogya Upanishad* describes Him as the "Refuge of love" and the "Lord of love." "O Rudra, let Thy gracious face protect me for ever."<sup>205</sup> "The Lord, the Giver of blessings, the Adorable God—by revering Him one attains eternal peace."<sup>206</sup> The seers of the Upanishads addressed Him as their Father and prayed to Him to lead them to the other side of *māyā*. The various forms which Saguna Brahman assumes for the welfare of the devotees have been known and worshipped all over the world—as the Father in Heaven, *Āllāh* the great, *Jehovah* the just, *Vishnu*, *Śiva*, and *Brahmā*—emphasizing the different aspects of the Great Lord *Maheśvara*.

A more tender and human manifestation of the Great Lord is seen in His Incarnations, the *Avatāras*. The *Bhagavad Gītā* says that whenever virtue declines and vice prevails, the Godhead, with the help of *māyā*, takes a human form for the protection of the virtuous and the chastisement of the wicked. Men naturally understand God better when He appears to them in a human form. They can then establish with Him a sweet, human relationship. They can regard Him as Father, Mother, Friend, or Beloved and pour out their heart's love for Him. This intense love of God consumes the dross of lust, greed, passion, anger, pride, selfishness, and other impurities of the devotee's mind and enables it to acquire one-pointedness. The mind thus purified can then comprehend the Absolute.

As already stated, *Nirguna Brahman* and *Saguna Brahman* are not fundamentally different entities. It is *māyā* that makes the difference, as a stick laid across water seems to divide it. *Śrī Ramakrishna* compared *Nirguna Brahman* to the infinite ocean, and *Saguna Brahman* to blocks of ice. Intense cold freezes the water of the ocean into solid ice; again, the blazing heat of the sun melts the ice into water. Likewise, on account of the intense love of the aspirant, Brahman, with the help of *māyā*, embodies Itself and becomes God with form; again, the discrimination and knowledge of the aspirant, like the heat of the sun, melt the form into the indefinable Absolute. When a bird—to use another illustration of *Śrī Ramakrishna's*—gets tired by continuously flying in the sky, it seeks a tree to rest its weary wings. Likewise, a seer of Truth, when not in communion with Pure Brahman, enjoys

<sup>204</sup> *Tai. Up.* II. 7.

<sup>205</sup> *Śvet. Up.* IV. 21.

<sup>206</sup> *Śvet. Up.* IV. 11.

the embodied forms of the Godhead. The *Bhāgavatam* says: "Even the sages who are delighted with the realization of their inmost Self, and who have cut all the bonds of the world, show for Hari<sup>207</sup> love which is utterly free from motives—such is His wonderful glory."

Māyā exercises its bewitching power upon the unilluminated; but the sages, whose minds are enlightened by the Knowledge of Brahman, see in the relative universe, created by māyā, the manifestation of Brahman. To them everything—even māyā—is Brahman. They do not deny the forms of God and the creation. Whether contemplating the Absolute or participating in the relative, they see Brahman alone everywhere—in the undifferentiated Absolute as well as in names and forms. Māyā cannot delude them. Śrī Ramakrishna used to say that to accept names and forms divorced from the reality of Brahman is ajnāna, ignorance; to see Brahman alone, and deny the world, is philosophical knowledge, jñāna; but to see Brahman everywhere, in names and forms, in good and evil, pain and pleasure, life and death, as well as in the depths of meditation, is vijnāna, a supremely rich knowledge. Endowed with vijnāna, blessed souls commune with Brahman in meditation and devote themselves, when not meditating, to the service of the world.

### METHODS OF INSTRUCTION: SYMBOLS

The seventh chapter of the *Chhāndogya Upanishad* narrates the story of Sanatkumāra instructing Nārada in the Knowledge of Brahman. The pupil had studied the different branches of the lower knowledge, such as the Vedic rituals, the Purānas, grammar, ethics, and the other sciences; but with all that, he knew that he could not overcome grief. He therefore asked the teacher for that knowledge which would carry him beyond grief. Sanatkumāra told Nārada that all he had studied was only a name. He taught Nārada about Brahman through such symbols as vāk (speech), manas (mind), sankalpa (desire), chittam (mind-stuff), and dhyānam (meditation). Through these Nārada was instructed finally in Bhumā, the Infinite, beyond which there is nothing, which comprehends all, fills all space, and yet is identical with Ātman.

The Upanishads abound in symbolic representations of Brahman and Ātman. What is the meaning of a symbol? It is a visible sign of an invisible entity. The Sanskrit words generally used for "symbol" are pratika and pratimā. Some of the important symbols of Brahman

<sup>207</sup> An epithet of the Personal God.

are prāṇa (the vital breath), vāyu (wind), ākāśa (space), manas (mind), āditya (the sun), and Om. A pratimā, or image, as seen in the popular religions, is also a symbol of the Godhead. Beginners, with their restricted understanding, need a symbol in order to contemplate the Highest. Thus a Cross, an Ark, a Crescent, a statue, a book, fire, and temples have all been used as so many symbols. In the minds of the unworthy a symbol often degenerates into an idol which is worshipped: to worship a symbol as God is idolatry. But to worship God through a symbol is a legitimate means of divine communion. In the one case the Godhead is brought down to the level of a material object; in the other case, the image itself is spiritualized. The Upanishads stress the method of knowledge more than that of formal worship. The Truth is to be realized by hearing about It from a qualified teacher, reasoning about It in one's own mind, and lastly by contemplating It.

Prajāpati taught Indra about Ātman by stages.<sup>208</sup> He had once declared: "The Self (Ātman), which is free from sin, free from old age, from death and grief, from hunger and thirst, which desires nothing but what it ought to desire and imagines nothing but what it ought to imagine—That it is which we must search out, That it is which we must try to understand." Indra, the king of the gods, and Virochana, the king of the demons, had approached Prajāpati and asked him about the Knowledge of Ātman. He taught them first through the illustration of the reflection one sees by looking into another's eyes, into water, and into a mirror, saying that what they saw there was Ātman. Both disciples took the body for the Self and went away satisfied. But Indra, after some contemplation, found limitations inherent in the corporeal self, which therefore could not be "immortal and fearless, free from hunger and thirst, sinless, and free from old age." He asked the teacher for further instruction and was taught that the self which roams about untrammelled in dreams was Ātman. In dreams it is free from the limitations of the waking body and yet it remains real and individual. But Indra thought that though the limitations of the waking state might not affect the dream soul, yet it remained bound by corporeal conditions. For instance, in dreams also one "becomes conscious, as it were, of pain and sheds tears." At last Prajāpati said: "When a man, being asleep, relaxed, and at perfect rest, sees no dreams—that is the Self. This is the Immortal, the Fearless; this is Brahman." Indra had thought that the state of deep sleep was surely a state of annihila-

<sup>208</sup> *Chh. Up. VIII. vii-xii.*

tion, when a man remains ignorant of himself and the universe. Prajāpati explained, however, the significance of deep sleep, in which the distinction of subject and object ceases to exist. It is nearest to the experience of Turiya, or Pure Consciousness, when the Self realizes Itself as the Knowing Subject without any object. This is the true and pristine nature of Consciousness, not resting upon empirical experience or devoted to objects external to Itself.

In the above illustration we see three successive conceptions of Ātman. First is the ordinary materialistic view. Ātman is the body; it perishes with it. The image seen in water or a mirror is a reflection of the body, complete "to the hair and the nails." When the body is adorned with fine clothes, the reflection also appears to be so adorned. Therefore by protecting the body with food and clothes one protects Ātman. Second, Ātman is the individual soul, which is always associated with a body but never dependent upon a particular one. In sleep the waking body is replaced by a dream body. According to this view Ātman is bound by corporeal conditions through successive births and deaths. Third, Ātman is Pure Consciousness, the non-dual and supreme Self, omnipresent and omniscient. It exists independent of empirical experience.

The method followed in the above instruction is called the Arundhatinyāya, or way of showing the star Arundhati. According to an old Hindu custom, a bride, after her marriage, is asked to look at a tiny star called Arundhati, hardly visible to the naked eye. She is first told to fix her gaze on the branch of a tree pointing to the star; next, on a large star close to it; then on a smaller star; and at last, when her eyes are trained, on Arundhati itself.

### BRAHMAN AS PRĀNA AND VĀYU

Two frequently used symbols of Brahman in the Upanishads are prāna and vāyu. The word prāna, often inadequately translated as "breath," is used in a variety of ways. It denotes the vital organs, the breathing, and also the life principle which animates the vital organs. It is identical with vāyu, the wind, which is the vital breath of the universe. Of vāyu, the cosmic breath, the breath of the individual is a partial manifestation. As in the case of the fly-shuttle in a textile mill, when the prāna begins to work, all the organs work. The body of an organic being lives as long as the prāna inhabits it. All the organs are dependent upon the prāna. "As bees go out when their queen goes

out, and return when she returns, thus deed, speech, eye, mind, and ear follow the prāna."<sup>209</sup> "As the spokes of a wheel hold to the nave, so does all this hold to the prāna."<sup>210</sup> Relinquished by the prāna, a living being is reduced to a corpse, without value or significance. The *Chhândogya Upanishad*, quoted above, says that a man must not treat roughly his father or mother, or sister or brother or teacher; if he does so he is condemned by all. But after the prāna has left them, their bodies, now corpses, may be struck even with a spear, as is done to a burning body on a funeral pyre.

Several Upanishads describe the rivalry of the organs to determine which one is supreme. Once, for example, the vital organs came to Prajāpati to learn which of them was essential to a living being. Prajāpati said: "He on account of whose departure the body seems worse than the worst—he is the best among you." The tongue (speech) departed. Having been absent for a year, it came back and asked: "How have you been able to live without me?" The other organs replied: "Like mute people, not speaking, but breathing with the nose, seeing with the eyes, hearing with the ears, and thinking with the mind. Thus we lived." Then, one by one, the eyes, the ears, the mind, departed. But the body continued to live, like one blind, one deaf, or one whose mind, like that of an infant, is not yet formed. But—"the prāna, when on the point of departing, tore up the other senses, as a horse, when he breaks loose, tears up the pegs to which he is tethered. They all came to him and said: 'Sir, be thou our lord. Thou art the best among us. Do not depart from us.'"<sup>211</sup>

Prāna is not only the life principle in the individual; it is also a cosmic principle. The Upanishads speak of the identity of the microcosm and the macrocosm: that which is manifest in the universe as a whole, with all its phenomena, finds complete expression in man as well. Thus it is said of a man that his head is heaven, his navel is the interspace, his feet the earth, his eyes the sun, his mind the moon, his mouth Indra and Agni, his ears the heavenly regions, and his prāna the wind. Prāna, on account of its pervasiveness, is identified with vāyu, the wind. Just as in the contest among the organs the prāna was declared to be the chief, so also in the contest among the gods—fire, the sun, the moon, and vāyu, which are the cosmic equivalents of the

<sup>209</sup> *Pr. Up.* II. 4.

<sup>210</sup> *Chh. Up.* VII. 15.

<sup>211</sup> *Chh. Up.* V. i. 6-12.

organs—vāyu came out supreme. For when all the gods became weary, vāyu alone retained its energy. Other deities fade; but not so, vāyu. Regarding vāyu it is declared: "From which the sun rises and in which it sets."<sup>212</sup> Prāna, as vāyu, is identified with Hiranyagarbha, or Sutrātmā. "Through this Sutra, or Vāyu, this and the next life and all beings are held together."<sup>213</sup> The senses, at the time of deep sleep, enter into the prāna, and the deities, at the end of a cycle, into Sutrātmā, or the cosmic prāna.

Thus we find in the Upanishads that one of the most important symbols of Brahman is prāna, the life principle that pervades and sustains the universe and the individual body. "Prāna is verily Brahman"—*prāno vai Brahma*.<sup>214</sup>

### MANAS AND ĀKĀŚA

The manas, or mind, is the inner organ. It is the instrument of deliberation. The mind deliberates on the sensations gathered through the outer organs (eyes, ears, nose, skin, and tongue) and determines what is right and what is wrong. Though an untrained mind is a cause of attachment and bondage, a purified mind is the means by which one realizes Brahman. "May He stimulate our understanding!" is the most ancient prayer of the Vedas. The Upanishads have used the mind as a symbol of Brahman. "Let a man meditate on the mind as Brahman."<sup>215</sup> *Mano vai Brahma*—"The mind is verily Brahman."<sup>216</sup>

Ākāśa, generally translated as sky, space, ether, or heaven, has no real equivalent in English. Swami Vivekananda has described it as an intangible substance which is the finest form of matter, as prāna is the subtlest form of energy. Ākāśa is that all-pervading and all-penetrating substance found everywhere in the universe, of which tangible objects are gross manifestations. It is the first material element to be evolved from Brahman. On account of its omnipresence and all-pervasiveness, ākāśa is often used as a symbol of Brahman. "It is ākāśa from which all these creatures take their rise and into which they again return. Ākāśa is older than these; ākāśa is their ultimate end."<sup>217</sup> "The Brahman which has been thus described [as immortal, with

<sup>212</sup> *Br. Up.* I. v. 23.

<sup>213</sup> *Br. Up.* III. vii. 2.

<sup>214</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. i. 3.

<sup>215</sup> *Chh. Up.* III. xviii. 1.

<sup>216</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. i. 6.

<sup>217</sup> *Chh. Up.* I. ix. 1.

three feet in heaven, and as the Gāyatri] is the same as the ākāśa which is around us; and the ākāśa which is around us is the same as the ākāśa which is within us; and the ākāśa which is within us is the same as the ākāśa which is within the heart. That ākāśa which is within the heart is omnipresent and unchanging."<sup>218</sup> The ākāśa "within the lotus of the heart" is to be meditated upon as Brahman. In the *Chhândogya Upanishad*,<sup>219</sup> kham (ākāśa) is declared to be identical with Kam (Bliss): "Kam is Brahman; kham is Brahman." Through these mutual qualifications both sensual pleasure and corporeality are denied with respect to Brahman.

### THE SUN

Of all phenomenal objects, the sun was regarded with the greatest wonder and admiration by the ancients everywhere. Its rays dispel darkness, and the daytime is generally filled with the various activities by which a civilization is created and developed. Even modern scientists are looking to the cosmic rays, associated with the sun, as a source of matter. The Upanishads describe the sun as a symbol of Brahman. The Gāyatri mantra is directed to the Purusha dwelling in the sun. The natural sunlight is a symbol of spiritual light. Brahman is the real Sun of the universe; and the natural sun is the phenomenal form of Brahman. The Purusha in the sun, whose counterpart is the purusha in the right eye, was worshipped by the Vedic seers. A dying man prays to the sun: "The door of the Truth is covered by a golden disc. Open it, O Nourisher! Remove it so that I who have been worshipping the Truth may behold It. O Nourisher, lone Traveller of the sky! Controller! O Sun, Offspring of Prajāpati! Gather Your rays; withdraw Your light. I would see, through Your grace, that form of Yours which is the fairest. I am indeed He, that Purusha, who dwells there."<sup>220</sup>

But the most important symbol of Brahman is Om. It is, as stated before, the symbol of both Nirguna Brahman and Brahman with attributes. Ordinary worshippers cannot disregard symbols. Only the highest man, in the depths of his meditation, sees Truth face to face and gives up symbols. As the times change, so do the symbols. Most of the Vedic symbols are out of date; their places have been taken by other and newer ones.

<sup>218</sup> *Chh. Up.* III. xii. 7-9.

<sup>219</sup> *IV.* x. 5.

<sup>220</sup> *Br. Up.* V. xv. 1; compare *Iś. Up.* 15-16.

BRAHMAN AND ĀTMAN (PSYCHOLOGY)<sup>221</sup>

The Vedānta philosophy admits the existence of a multitude of individual souls, *jīvātmās*, and distinguishes these from the Supreme Soul, *Paramātmā*. The individual soul is attached to a body and is the victim of hunger and thirst, pain and pleasure, good and evil, and the other pairs of opposites. Limited in power and wisdom, it is entangled in the eternal round of *samsāra* and seeks deliverance from it. Scriptural study, instruction from a teacher, and practice of ethical and spiritual disciplines are all meant for the benefit of bound, individual souls. The Supreme Soul, or Brahman, is omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient. It is eternally free, illumined, and pure.

When a man realizes Brahman, he transcends the scriptures, ethics, and the injunctions of religion; but until that moment the experiences of the embodied individual soul are real to him. As long as he sees good and evil he must cultivate the former and shun the latter. The experience of deep sleep is real to the sleeper, but it ceases to exist when he begins to dream. Dream experiences are real to the dreamer, but become meaningless when he is awake. Likewise, waking experiences are real to the waking person, but become meaningless to him when he attains the Knowledge of Brahman.

Though the individual soul and the Supreme Soul are apparently as different from each other as "a glow-worm from the sun and a mustard-seed from Mt. Everest," yet in reality they are completely identical. Each individual soul is Brahman, the Absolute. Its real nature appears to be limited by the *upādhis* of the sense-organs, the mind, the *prāṇa*, and so forth, all created by ignorance, or *avidyā*. Under the influence of this cosmic illusion, which is capable of making the impossible possible,

<sup>221</sup> The Sanskrit word *ātman* has been translated in the present book as soul and self. *Ātman* has been used in the Vedānta philosophy to denote both the individual being and the Supreme Being (though ultimately these are identical, yet their difference is admitted in the relative state); the individual being has been expressed by *ātman*, soul, and self (with small letter); the Supreme Being, by *Ātman*, Soul, and Self (with capital letter). The Sanskrit word *puruṣa* has been translated as person. This word, too, signifies both the individual being and the Universal Being. We have indicated the difference by the use of small and capital letters. The word means, literally, the one who dwells in the body or who pervades the body, which may be the individual physical body or the universe. According to the Non-dualists, the *Puruṣa*, the Supreme Person, is Pure Consciousness, pervading the individual body and the universe; but the Dualists describe It as a Person endowed with a form and attributes.



the attributeless Brahman becomes both Maheśvara, or the Supreme Lord, and the jiva, or individual soul. The former has māyā under His control; the latter is controlled by māyā. The individual soul takes māyā to be real. The Upanishads admit the empirical reality (vyavahārika sattvā) of the jiva and deal with its characteristics, wanderings, and final deliverance. But it must always be remembered that the self is Ātman, one and without a second. "This is your self that is within all."<sup>222</sup>

Ātman, through māyā, has projected material forms from Itself and then entered into them as their living self—*anena jivena ātmanā anupraviśya*.<sup>223</sup> Thus the Upanishads speak of two souls, as it were, dwelling side by side in a man: the Real Soul and the apparent soul. "Two there are who dwell within the body, in the buddhi, the supreme ākāśa of the heart, enjoying the sure rewards of their own actions. The knowers of Brahman describe them as light and shade. . ."<sup>224</sup> When it is said that the Supreme Soul enjoys rewards, the statement is to be taken in a figurative sense. He does not, in reality, enjoy anything, but looks on indifferently at the activities of the other soul. The contrast between the two is made vivid in the following text: "Two birds, inseparable friends, cling to the same tree. One of them eats the sweet fruit; the other looks on without eating. On the same tree the purusha sits, grieving, immersed, bewildered by his own impotence. But when he sees the other, the Lord, contented, and knows His glory, then his grief passes away."<sup>225</sup> The whole fifth chapter of the *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad* is devoted to the contrast between the Supreme Soul and the individual soul. The individual soul is endowed with desire, ego, and mind; it enjoys the fruits of its actions; it is limited and insignificant. But it wins Immortality after ridding itself of its upādhis. Then it is recognized as identical with the infinitely great Supreme Soul. "It is not woman, it is not man, nor is it neuter. Whatever body it takes, with that it is joined. By means of thoughts, touching, seeing, and passions, the jiva assumes successively, in various places, various forms in accordance with his deeds, just as the body grows when food and drink are poured into it. The jiva assumes many shapes, coarse or refined, in accordance with his virtue, and having himself caused his union with

<sup>222</sup> *Br. Up.* III. iv. 1.

<sup>223</sup> *Chh. Up.* VI. iii. 2.

<sup>224</sup> *Ka. Up.* I. iii. 1.

<sup>225</sup> *Śvet. Up.* IV. 6-7.

them, is seen as different beings, through the qualities of his acts and the qualities of his body."<sup>226</sup>

It has already been stated that the Supreme Soul, through *māyā*, assumes a limited body and becomes finite and individualized. The great mystery is that even while subjected to all the limitations and sufferings of the relative world, It does not in reality lose, even in the slightest degree, Its perfect nature. While the *jiva*, compelled by the bright and dark fruits of its actions, enters on a good or a bad birth, follows a course upwards or downwards, and roams about overcome by the pairs of opposites, "his immortal Self remains like a drop of water on a lotus leaf."<sup>227</sup> He himself is overcome by the *gunas* of nature. Then, because he is thus overcome, he becomes bewildered, and because he is bewildered he does not see the Creator, the holy Lord, abiding within himself. Carried along by the waves of the *gunas*, darkened in his imagination, unstable, fickle, crippled, full of desires, vacillating, sensual, disordered, and a prey to delusion, he fancies: 'This is I,' 'This is mine,' and fetters himself by his own action, as a bird by its nest."<sup>228</sup> Śankarāchārya explains the cause of his bondage as "the result of his works, which have originated from such functions of the mind as will and desire"—*manah-sankalpa-icchā-ādi-nispannakarmanimittena*.

"From Ātman are born *prāṇa*, mind, and all the sense-organs."<sup>229</sup> After creating the body, Ātman enters into it as the living soul. "Right to the tips of the fingers," He fills the body and is hidden in it like a knife in its sheath or fire in fuel. "When It does the function of living, It is called the *prāṇa*; when It speaks, the organ of speech; when It sees, the eye; when It hears, the ear; and when It thinks, the mind. These are merely Its names according to Its functions."<sup>230</sup>

### THE SENSE-ORGANS

There are ten *indriyas*, sense-organs, all subordinate to the mind as the central organ. A sense-organ—the eye, for instance—is not the outer instrument that one sees, nor the optic nerve, but its subtle counterpart, which accompanies the subtle body after death. The sense-organs are different from the *prāṇa*; the latter is active even in sleep, when the senses do not function. As the rays of light are gathered

<sup>226</sup> Śvet. Up. V. 10-12.

<sup>227</sup> I.e. unattached.

<sup>228</sup> Mai. Up. III. 2.

<sup>229</sup> Mu. Up. II. i. 3.

<sup>230</sup> Br. Up. I. iv. 7.

in the sunset, "so also [on a man's falling asleep] is all this gathered in the manas, the supreme deity. Therefore at that time the man does not hear, see, smell, taste, or touch; he does not speak, grasp, beget, evacuate, or move about. He sleeps—that is what people say."<sup>231</sup> The sense-organs are ten: five of perception, five of action. The former comprise the ears, nose, tongue, skin, and eyes; the latter, the hands, feet, tongue, and the organs of evacuation and generation.

The mind is the inner organ, the antahkarana. "Desire, deliberation, doubt, faith, want of faith, patience, impatience, shame, intelligence, and fear—all these are but the mind."<sup>232</sup> The mind is the central organ of the entire conscious life. The impressions carried by the sense-organs are shaped by the mind into ideas; for "we see only with the mind, hear with the mind." Further, the mind changes the ideas into resolutions of the will (*sankalpa*). "When a man directs his manas to the study of the sacred hymns and sayings, he then *studies* them; when to the accomplishment of works, he then *accomplishes* them; when to the desire for sons and cattle, he then *desires* them; when to the desire for the present and the future worlds, he then *desires* them."<sup>233</sup>

## PRĀNA

A variety of meanings is attached to prāna—for instance, breath, life, and the sense-organs. Primarily prāna means that vital force in a living being which is incessantly active in waking and sleep. In sleep the organs of sense enter into the mind and "the fires of the prāna keep watch, as it were, in the city of the body."<sup>234</sup> According to its different functions, the prāna is given five names: prāna, apāna, vyāna, udāna, and samāna. "Now the air which rises upwards is prāna; that which moves downwards is apāna."<sup>235</sup> Vyāna "sweeps like a flame through all the limbs"; it is what sustains life when, for instance, in drawing a stiff bow, a man neither breathes in nor breathes out.<sup>236</sup> Udāna conducts the soul from the body at death.<sup>237</sup> By virtue of samāna, food is assimilated.<sup>238</sup>

According to the later Vedāntists the five organs of action, the five

<sup>231</sup> *Pr. Up.* IV. 2.

<sup>232</sup> *Br. Up.* I. v. 3.

<sup>233</sup> *Chh. Up.* VII. iii. 1.

<sup>234</sup> *Pr. Up.* IV. 3.

<sup>235</sup> *Mat. Up.* II. 6.

<sup>236</sup> See *Chh. Up.* I. iii. 5.

<sup>237</sup> See *Pr. Up.* III. 7.

<sup>238</sup> See *Mat. Up.* II. 6.

organs of perception, the five prānas, the manas, and the buddhi constitute the "subtle body," which accompanies the soul at the time of rebirth. The gross body is dissolved at death; the subtle body departs with the organs. The relation between the subtle body and the gross body is like that between seed and plant. According to some Vedāntists another entity, called the "shelter of karma" (karma-āśraya), which determines the character of the new body and life, accompanies the subtle body. This entity is formed of impressions created by the actions performed in the course of life. "As it (the jiva) does and acts, so it becomes; by doing good it becomes good and by doing evil it becomes evil—it becomes virtuous through good acts and vicious through evil acts."<sup>239</sup>

### THE GROSS PHYSICAL BODY

Vedāntists analyse the material body into five kośas, or sheaths, namely, the gross physical sheath (annamayakośa), the sheath of the prāna (prānamayakośa), the sheath of the mind (manomayakośa), the sheath of the buddhi or intellect (vijñānamayakośa), and the sheath of bliss (ānandamayakośa). They are called sheaths because they conceal Ātman, as a sheath conceals a sword. They are described as being one inside another—the physical sheath being the outermost and the sheath of bliss the innermost. Each succeeding sheath is finer than the preceding one. As a fine substance permeates a gross one, so the finer sheath permeates the grosser sheath. Ātman is detached from the sheaths. Its light and consciousness permeate them all, though in varying degrees according to their density. By cultivating detachment toward these sheaths, one by one, and gradually penetrating deeper, a man realizes Ātman as Pure Consciousness.<sup>240</sup>

The body is often described as the city of Brahman.<sup>241</sup> The gates of the body are sometimes described as eleven,<sup>242</sup> and sometimes as nine.<sup>243</sup> The nine gates consist of the eyes, the ears, the nostrils, the mouth, and the organs of evacuation and generation. Two additional gates are the navel and the aperture at the top of the head (Brahmarandhra). Without the soul, the body is absolutely valueless—a mere corpse. "This ill-

<sup>239</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 5.

<sup>240</sup> For a detailed description of the sheaths, see *Self-Knowledge*, by Swami Nikhilananda, p. 81 ff.

<sup>241</sup> See *Br. Up.* II. v. 18.

<sup>242</sup> *Ka. Up.* II. ii. 1.

<sup>243</sup> *Śvet. Up.* III. 18.

smelling, unsubstantial body: a mere mass of bones, skin, sinews, marrow, flesh, seed, blood, mucus, tears, eye-gum, ordure, urine, gall, and phlegm. What is the use of enjoying pleasures in this body, which is assailed by lust, hatred, greed, delusion, fear, anguish, jealousy, separation from what is loved, union with what is not loved, hunger, thirst, old age, death, illness, grief, and other evils?"<sup>244</sup>

The heart has received much attention from the seers of the Upanishads. It is the resting-place of the prānas, the senses, and the mind. It is the abode of Brahman. "That great birthless Self, which is identified with the intellect and is in the midst of the organs, lies in the ākāśa that is within the heart. It is the controller of all, the lord of all, the ruler of all."<sup>245</sup> Its physical shape is often compared to a lotus bud. The aspirant is asked to meditate on Brahman dwelling in the heart.

### THE STATES OF THE SOUL

The Upanishads discuss at great length the three states of the soul (avasthātraya). They are the waking state, the dream state, and dreamless sleep. These cover the totality of the soul's experiences in the relative world. As we analyse the three states, Ātman's metaphysical nature becomes more and more plainly visible. But in its true nature—as Turiya, or the Fourth—Ātman is the detached "Witness of the three states." During the state of deep sleep the soul enjoys a temporary union with Brahman and frees itself from fear and suffering. But, as Turiya, it experiences consciously and always the undying Bliss of Brahman.

### WAKING

Ātman, during the waking state—when It is known by the technical name of Viśva or Vaiśvānara—experiences the physical world in common with all men. It uses the various sense-organs as Its instruments. But there is no real difference between waking and dreaming. In both states a false reality is contemplated; one's real Self remains unknown. Waking, like dreaming, is māyā, as Gaudapāda states, since it projects for us a manifold universe. The perceptions of waking, just like those of dreams, have their origin solely within man himself and have no other existence except in the mind of him who is awake. And further, as the reality of the dreamer is discarded on awakening, so too the

<sup>244</sup> *Mat. Up.* I. 3.

<sup>245</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 22.

so-called reality of waking is discarded when we dream. Just as a fish swims between the two banks of a river without touching them, so Ātman roams between the states of waking and dreaming;<sup>246</sup> from waking It hastens to dreaming, and from this again "back to the waking state. He is untouched by whatever he sees in that state, for this Infinite Being is unattached."<sup>247</sup>

### DREAMING

The dream world is a private world of the dreamer—from the waking standpoint, of course. The soul, while dreaming, is known by the technical name of *Taijasa*. The experiences of a dream are as real as waking experiences, so long as the dream lasts. On awaking from a dream, a man discovers that his body and senses were inactive and thus concludes that he was dreaming. "When he dreams, he takes away a little of [the impressions of] this all-embracing world (the waking state), himself puts the body aside, and creates [a dream body in its place], revealing his own lustre by his own light—and dreams. In this state the man himself becomes the light. There are no chariots, no animals to be yoked to them, no roads there, but he creates the chariots, animals, and roads. There are no pleasures, joys, or delights there, but he creates the pleasures, joys, and delights. There are no pools, tanks, or rivers there, but he creates the pools, tanks, and rivers; for he is the creator."<sup>248</sup> "In the dream world the Shining One, attaining higher and lower states, puts forth innumerable forms. He seems to be enjoying himself in the company of women, or laughing, or even seeing frightful things."<sup>249</sup> The subject and the object in the dream, and their relationship, are all created by Ātman from the mind-stuff and illumined by Its own effulgence. This is evidence that Ātman is the inner light of man.

### DREAMLESS SLEEP

The dreamer passes into profound sleep, in which state Ātman is known by the technical name of *Prājna*. "When a man, being thus asleep, sees no dream whatever, he becomes one with *Prāna* alone; then speech enters therein with all names, the eye with all forms, the ear

<sup>246</sup> See *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 18.

<sup>247</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 18.

<sup>248</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 9-10.

<sup>249</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 13.

with all sounds, the mind with all thoughts."<sup>250</sup> In deep sleep the soul is united with the Consciousness that is Brahman (Prājñena Ātmanā).<sup>251</sup> There are no longer any contrasted objects; there is no consciousness in the empirical sense. There is a union with the eternal Knowing Subject, that is to say, with Brahman. But this union is only apparent and is unlike the true union that follows the Knowledge of Brahman. The sleeper returns to consciousness of the waking world and becomes again his old self. In dreamless sleep Ātman remains covered by the thin layer of the veiling-power of māyā; that is why, unlike Turiya, It is unconscious of the world. Like two extremes, which sometimes meet, the state of deep sleep in many respects resembles perfect Knowledge. It is a state where a man is fearless, beyond desires, and free from evils. Like a man in perfect communion with Brahman, he does not know anything at all of the world within or without. "In this state a father is no father, a mother no mother, the worlds are no worlds, the Vedas no Vedas. In this state a thief is no thief, the killer of a noble brāhmin is no killer . . . [this form of his] is untouched by good works and untouched by evil works; for he is beyond all the woes of his heart (intellect)."<sup>252</sup> In the state of deep sleep the soul does not really become unconscious. The Consciousness belonging to Ātman is not destroyed, because this Consciousness is immortal. It appears, therefore, that in the relative world the nearest approach to the peace and desirelessness of Brahman is the experience of deep sleep.

### TURIYA

Ātman in Its purest form, detached from the three states and subsisting alone and by Itself, is called Turiya, which is the same as Nirguna Brahman. That Turiya is different from the state of deep sleep has been emphasized by Gaudavāda. "Prājña (the Self associated with deep sleep) does not know anything of the Self or the non-Self, neither truth nor untruth. But Turiya is ever existent and ever all-seeing. Non-cognition of duality is common to both Prājña and Turiya. But Prājña is associated with sleep, in which relative experiences remain in seed form; there is no sleep in Turiya."<sup>253</sup> "To dream is to cognize Reality in a wrong manner. [Even an awakened man, under the spell

<sup>250</sup> *Kau. Up.* III. 3.

<sup>251</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 21.

<sup>252</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iii. 22.

<sup>253</sup> *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā.* I. 12-13.

of ignorance, acts as if he were dreaming.] Deep sleep is the state in which one does not know at all what Reality is. When the erroneous knowledge associated with dreaming and deep sleep disappears, one realizes Turiya. When the jiva, asleep under the influence of the beginningless māyā, is awakened, it then realizes [within itself] Non-duality, eternal and dreamless."<sup>254</sup> Turiya is free from the notion of the empirical subject and object. It pervades all the phenomena of the relative universe, as the desert pervades a mirage. It is the unrelated foundation of the three states and is realized by the illumined soul always and in everything, once ignorance is dispelled by the Vedāntic discipline.

### WHAT BECOMES OF A MAN AFTER DEATH

The question regarding a man's hereafter was perhaps raised even at the dawn of human thinking. Vedic philosophy has dealt with the subject, and the conclusion arrived at is very significant. The doctrine of karma and the rebirth of the soul has exercised a profound practical influence upon millions of Hindus from the most ancient times. Even now its influence on their daily lives is great. All the good and evil that befall a man during one lifetime cannot be explained if we confine our attention to this life alone. What does he know of life who only one life knows? In the narrow span of a single life we cannot possibly reap the fruit of all that we do. It is reasonable to admit the existence of a transmigrating soul in order to substantiate the general belief in moral requital. "A mortal ripens like corn, and like corn he springs up again."<sup>255</sup> But the seed is left. We are all born with a blue-print of our life, as it were, mainly prepared by our actions in the previous life. Our present acts and thoughts are the result of our past and create our future. Man is the architect of his own fate and the builder of his own future destiny. This conviction makes the believer in the doctrine of rebirth responsible for his present suffering and also gives him an incentive for habitual right conduct to build up a happy future. As he accepts with serenity his present good or ill fortune, he can also look forward to the future with joy and courage. If present suffering is the result of a past wicked action, then, in order to avoid suffering in a future existence, a thoughtful man should desire to sin no more.

It is claimed by yogins that through proper spiritual disciplines one

<sup>254</sup> *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā. I.* 15-16.

<sup>255</sup> *Ka. Up. I. i.* 6.



can learn about one's past lives. Buddhist thinkers also share this view. But what happens after death is, to the rational mind, a mere matter of conjecture. The experiences of the hereafter cannot be demonstrated in public. Time, space, and other conditions would certainly be different on the two sides of the grave. Therefore a living man would not understand the accounts of the dead even if they were to return to earth to tell him of their experiences. For this reason a scientific mind can only accept a plausible theory regarding after-death experiences. The theory of total annihilation is not satisfactory. It gives only a partial picture of existence. This theory is not only inconsistent with the self-love we all possess, but also with the intuitive and direct experience of the seers regarding the indestructibility of the Soul and Its freedom from birth and dissolution. The rishis of the Upanishads were not impressed by the theory of eternal retribution in heaven or hell. That theory reveals a total disproportion between cause and effect. Life on earth is short, exposed to error, and bristling with temptations. Many of our wrong actions are the result of faulty upbringing and environment. To inflict upon the soul eternal punishment for the errors of a few years, or even of a whole lifetime, is to throw to the winds all sense of proportion. It is also inconsistent with God's love for His created beings.

The Hindus have therefore developed the doctrine of rebirth. According to this view, it is the desire for material objects that is responsible for a person's embodiment. Desires are of many kinds: some can be fulfilled in a human body, some in a subhuman body, and others in a superhuman body. When a man has fulfilled every desire through repeated births, without deriving abiding satisfaction, and finds the relative world to be bound by the law of cause and effect, he longs for communion with Brahman, which alone is untouched by the causal law. In most cases—barring those souls who attain Liberation from Brahmaloka—a human body is the best instrument for the attainment of Knowledge and Freedom; for in a god's body or in a subhuman body one experiences only the fruits of one's past action. Neither a god nor an animal reaps the fruits of action. Therefore they cannot be liberated unless they are born again in a human body.

According to the theory of rebirth, a soul is born again and again, high or low, depending on the merit or demerit of his actions, so that in every birth he may acquire a little more understanding and detachment and in the end attain perfect Knowledge and Freedom. This theory is in conformity with the law of cause and effect, which is the

very basis of the physical universe. It is also in agreement with the spiritual experiences of the mystics regarding man's ultimate end, which is the attainment of the knowledge of the Soul's Immortality. Rebirth is the inevitable corollary of the Soul's indestructibility and explains the *raison d'être* of its embodiment in the relative universe.

It must not be forgotten, however, that the doctrine of rebirth belongs to the *aparā vidyā*, the lower knowledge, and operates in the universe of *māyā*. The *Parā Vidyā*, or Higher Knowledge, removes the illusion of the manifold world and, with it, of the individual soul and its birth, death, and hereafter.

There are many strands of thoughts in the Vedas and the Upanishads concerning the soul's hereafter. Vāmadeva, an illumined seer of the Rig-Veda said: "I was Manu, and the sun."<sup>256</sup> The gods, who enjoy a relative immortality, are those fortunate souls who, as a result of their meritorious actions on earth, are elevated to exalted positions after death. Men seeking heavenly felicity often worship the gods.

The kingdom of inexhaustible light  
Whence is derived the radiance of the sun—  
To this kingdom transport me,  
Eternal, undying.

Where is longing and the consummation of longing,  
Where the other side of the sun is seen,  
Where is refreshment and satiety—  
There suffer me to dwell immortal.

Where bliss resides, and felicity,  
Where joy beyond joy dwells,  
Where the craving of desire is stilled—  
There suffer me to dwell immortal.<sup>257</sup>

"O Fire, lead us by the good path for the enjoyment of the fruit of our action. You know, O god, all our deeds."<sup>258</sup> The ignorant are sent to a region of "blind darkness,"<sup>259</sup> but not to hell. Since each soul is a

<sup>256</sup> *Br. Up.* I. iv. 10.

<sup>257</sup> *Rī. IX.* cxlii. 7, 10, 11 (from the translation by Deussen).

<sup>258</sup> *Id. Up.* 18.

<sup>259</sup> *Id. Up.* 3.

"portion of the Divine," none can ever be utterly destroyed or deprived altogether of his spiritual heritage. There are passages in the Vedas indicating retribution, which consists in having dealt out to us in the next life the very same good and evil which we have dealt out to others in this. Each man is born into a world that has been fashioned by himself. Discerning souls, who have realized the transitory nature of life on earth or in the heavenly worlds, want to avoid a "renewed death" (punarmrityu) and therefore aspire to Brahmaloaka, the Highest Heaven, from which one does not return to earth.<sup>200</sup>

The teachings of the *Katha Upanishad* begin with a direct question regarding the soul's hereafter. "There is this doubt about a man when he is dead: Some say that he exists; others, that he does not. This I should like to know, taught by you." The teacher, the god of death, first gives, in reply, a striking discourse on the Soul's indestructibility. Then he states the doctrine of rebirth. "Some jivas enter the womb to be embodied as organic beings, and some go into non-organic matter—according to their work and according to their knowledge."<sup>201</sup>

The Bhagavad Gītā describes death as one of a series of changes: "Even as the embodied Self passes, in this body, through the stages of childhood, youth, and old age, so does It pass into another body. Calm souls are not bewildered by this."<sup>202</sup> Rebirth is directly referred to in the following verse: "Even as a person casts off worn-out clothes and puts on others that are new, so the embodied Self casts off worn-out bodies and enters into others that are new."<sup>203</sup>

The doctrine of rebirth was considered by Yājñavalkya to be a profound mystery. No fruitful purpose could be served by discussing it in a public assembly of pundits. "Yājñavalkya," so Ārthabhāga spoke, 'when the vocal organ of a man who dies is merged in fire, the nose in the air, the eye in the sun, the mind in the moon, the ear in the quarters, the body in the earth, the ākāśa of the heart in the external ākāśa, the hair on the body in the herbs, that on the head in the trees, and the blood and semen in water, where then is the man?' Yājñavalkya answered: 'Give me your hand, dear Ārthabhāga. We shall decide this matter between ourselves; we cannot do it in a crowd.' They went out and talked it over. What they mentioned there was work, and what

<sup>200</sup> See p. 69.

<sup>201</sup> *Ka. Up.* II. ii. 7.

<sup>202</sup> *B. G.* II. 13.

<sup>203</sup> *B. G.* II. 22.

they praised there was also work. Therefore one becomes good through good work and evil through evil work."<sup>264</sup>

For a more vivid description of rebirth: "When the soul departs, the *prāṇa* follows; when the *prāṇa* departs, all the organs follow. Then the soul has particular consciousness and goes to the body which is related to that consciousness. It is followed by knowledge, works, and past experience. Just as a leech supported on a straw goes to the end of it, takes hold of another support, and contracts itself, so does the self throw this body aside—make it senseless—take hold of another support, and contract itself. Just as a goldsmith takes a little quantity of gold and fashions another—a newer and better—form, so does the soul throw this body away, or make it senseless, and make another—a newer and better—form, suited to the manes, or the celestial minstrels, or the gods, or *Virāt*, or *Hiranyagarbha*, or other beings. . . . As it does and acts, so it becomes; by doing good it becomes good, and by doing evil it becomes evil—it becomes virtuous through good acts and vicious through evil acts. Others, however, say: 'The self is identified with desire alone. What it desires, it resolves; what it resolves, it works out; what it works out, it attains.' "<sup>265</sup>

The *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*<sup>266</sup> describes the "doctrine of the Five Fires" in connexion with rebirth. This doctrine, which was a secret with the *kshattriyas*, was taught by *Pravāhana*, the king of the *Panchālas*, to the *brāhmin* *Āruni*, as we have seen. According to this teaching, as the body is cremated, the soul ascends heavenward through the flame and smoke and goes to the Plane of the Moon, whence it falls to earth in the form of rain. With the rain it is absorbed by plants that bear cereal; with the food it is eaten by man and is transformed into semen, and, entering a woman's womb, is born as a human being. Thus people are born again and again on earth and lead their merry-go-round existence. But those wretched souls who do not follow either of the two ways—the Way of the Gods (*Devayāna*) or the Way of the Fathers (*Pitriyāna*)<sup>267</sup>—become insects: moths or biting creatures like gnats and mosquitoes.<sup>268</sup>

<sup>264</sup> *Br. Up.* III. ii. 13.

<sup>265</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 2-5.

<sup>266</sup> VI. ii. 2-14.

<sup>267</sup> See p. 70.

<sup>268</sup> See *Br. Up.* VI. ii. 16.

## LIBERATION (MOKSHA)

The Plane of the Moon and the worlds of the insignificant creatures fall to the lot of those who are attached to material things, cling to individual life, cherish desires, and seek the results of action. Those who seek release from death and practise spiritual discipline, on the other hand, gain Brahmaloka, where one experiences immortality in a relative sense. But the reflective man, in whom the higher faculties of the mind are awakened, longs for release from phenomenal existence itself, with all its fetters and bonds that keep the senses tied to the world.

The assurance of rebirth may bring happiness to those who are afraid of annihilation after death or of the boredom of heaven; but life on earth in any form cannot escape old age, disease, and death. The law of karma is inexorable here and in heaven, or, as a matter of fact, anywhere in time and space. The individual soul is bound by this chain of cause and effect. The seeker after Liberation, therefore, resolves upon "cutting the knot" by turning away from the entire phenomenal existence of time, space, and causality. True, the destruction of individuality and the suppression of the natural cravings are regarded by many as the severest punishment; but these are the supreme reward for the spiritual endeavour of those who aspire to true Immortality.

What impelled the rishis of the Upanishads to regard the whole of phenomenal existence as evil and the absorption of individuality in Brahman as the Highest Good? It was not their desire to escape the sufferings of existence, well known to all; it was not their unwillingness to face the problems of life. Nor was it the result of frustration, which, it is often stated, was experienced by the majority of the Hindus because they were always exploited by a handful of brāhmin priests and kshattriya rulers. Life on the banks of the Ganges and the Indus was happy, affluent, and colourful. It was filled with the joy of adventure, as evidenced by the many-sided development of Hindu society at that time. Moreover, the longing for Liberation was not cultivated by the downtrodden masses, but by reflective minds belonging to the upper castes. The brāhmin boy Nachiketā spurned all the happiness of earth and heaven in order to attain Liberation. Maitreyi refused to accept from her brāhmin husband her share of wealth, which makes a worldly person happy, because she wanted to know the secret of Immortality. The desire for Liberation, as we shall presently see,

was not the result of any extraneous conditions; it was the necessary consequence of the doctrine of Brahman and Ātman developed in the Upanishads.

One studying this Upanishadic doctrine, unique and original in the entire range of human thought, cannot but admire the daring of the Hindu mind in the field of metaphysical speculation. And as one witnesses men and women, in all stages of life, ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of Immortality and Freedom, one cannot but be impressed by their tremendous will power. The complete renunciation of everything one holds near and dear in the mortal world—including inordinate attachment to one's own body, ego, and individual self—is the *sine qua non* of the realization of Freedom. And yet the Vedas and the books of the Hindu dharma ask a Hindu to cultivate a warm love of life. One must enjoy, on earth, one hundred years—the life-span allotted to man by God. Marriage is compulsory for Hindu men and women, except in a few specified cases. One without progeny goes, after death, to the abode of suffering. Without money no all-round happiness can be enjoyed. One must heighten the power of the senses so that, through enjoyment of material pleasures, one may relieve the drab grey of everyday existence. The first period of life should be devoted to the acquisition of learning, the second, to the enjoyment of material pleasures, and the third, to the contemplation of the gods, so that after death one may attain untold happiness in heaven. "Through wealth one conquers this world, through progeny, the World of the Fathers, and through sacrificial offerings, the World of the Gods." All of this is minutely described in the Vedas, which, to a Hindu, are the source of spiritual wisdom. He must not only study the Vedas but actually perform the sacrifices that they enjoin.

And yet the three worlds—earth, heaven, and the interspace—will one day disappear. Brahmā, the Creator God, with all the dwellers in the Highest Heaven, will also perish. The Vedic sacrifices bring rewards that are contaminated by māyā and the three gunas. The inquirer after Immortality must transcend the Vedas. He is required to cut at the very foundation of the attachment that supports the phenomenal existence here and hereafter. He must relinquish the longing for wealth, progeny, and the heavenly world. These make one forgetful of Ātman. The forgetfulness of one's true Self is the greatest suffering for a man. Everything that is not Ātman is trivial (*alpam*). There is no real happiness in the trivial; the only happiness is in the Infinite (*Bhumā*).

Why, then, did the Vedas lay down injunctions for a religious life and the propitiation of the gods through sacrifices? The earthbound soul must learn through actual experience the futility of attachment to material things. It must pass through the whole gamut of empirical existence, from that of the "blade of grass" to the noble life of Brahman. Only then will it cultivate dispassion for *māyā* and its effects. Those alone who have renounced all longing for the pleasures found on earth, and also for the felicity in heaven described in the Vedas, can cultivate *vairāgyam*, dispassion, and become entitled to the Knowledge of Ātman. Every soul, it is true, after going through all the worldly experiences, will in course of time attain Liberation; but the Vedic scheme of life shortens the period of our sojourn in the relative world.

It is quite natural for people to regard that as the highest aim of personal endeavour which they consider to be the basis of the universe and the First Principle of things. Those who regard the deities in that light seek union with them after death. Thus they worship various gods in order to obtain fellowship and companionship with them in heaven. Again, those who consider Brahman to be the origin and end of things naturally want union with It. Brahman, Pure Consciousness, is the same as Ātman. Therefore the attainment of Ātman becomes the supreme goal of life. That is why the realization of Ātman has been stressed in the Vedas. "Only he who knows the Purusha escapes from the realm of death; by no other road is it possible to go."<sup>269</sup> "The Self is his pathfinder; he who finds Him is no longer stained by action, that evil thing."<sup>270</sup> "He is my Soul; thither to this Soul, on my departure hence, shall I go."<sup>271</sup>

The nature of Brahman, or Ātman, is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. It dwells in every heart. On account of *māyā* a man is not conscious of his true Self. So the only way to Liberation is that of the Knowledge of the Self. Ethical laws, sacrificial ceremonies, philanthropic works, austerities, study of scripture, worship, and other similar spiritual disciplines only serve to remove the impurities of the mind, which hinder the manifestation of Ātman. Ātman is to be known now and here, and not elsewhere after death. "If a man knows Ātman here, he then attains the true goal of life. If he does not know It here, a great destruction awaits him."<sup>272</sup> Therefore the Upanishads lay down, again and again,

<sup>269</sup> *Vāj. Sam.* XXXI. 18.

<sup>270</sup> *Tai. Br.* III. xii. 9. 8.

<sup>271</sup> *Śa. Br.* X. vi. 3.

<sup>272</sup> *Ke. Up.* II. 5.

Self-Knowledge as the condition for Self-realization. And the Vedic seers admonish us to ask for this Knowledge in our daily prayers.

Moksha, or Liberation, is not the result of Knowledge. It is not a new acquisition. Causation applies to the realm of becoming and not to Brahman, which is Pure Being and beyond all categories. Causation rules the finite world of the manifold. It is inconceivable in Ātman, which is one and without a second. If Moksha were the result of Knowledge and were therefore endowed with a beginning, it would then come to an end. It would not be eternal. Arising from non-existence, it would again dissolve into nothingness. "Moksha (Liberation) cannot have a beginning and be eternal."<sup>273</sup> Liberation is therefore not something which is created, but is the realization of That which has existed from eternity but has hitherto been concealed from us. "All jivas are ever free from bondage and pure by nature. They are ever illumined and liberated from the very beginning."<sup>274</sup> As people who do not know the location of hidden gold fail to find it though walking over it again and again, so likewise, "all these creatures, day after day, go into the world of Brahman, being merged in Brahman while asleep, and yet do not discover It because they are carried away by untruth."<sup>275</sup> He who knows the Self is liberated; even the gods cannot prevent his being so, because he has realized himself to be the very Soul (Ātman) of the gods.<sup>276</sup> "He who knows the Supreme Brahman verily becomes Brahman."<sup>277</sup> He has attained the true Immortality, that is to say, indestructibility without a continued existence, and not the state of non-dying-ness in heaven. Thus, according to the Upanishads, Liberation is not the result of the Knowledge of Ātman; it is that Knowledge. It is not affected by the Knowledge of Ātman; but this Knowledge is itself Liberation in its fullness. Desire is death; desirelessness is Liberation. He who has realized himself as Brahman, infinite and all-pervading, he who sees the whole universe in himself and himself in the universe, cannot desire anything. "What can he crave who has attained all desires?"<sup>278</sup> "The fetters of the heart are broken, all doubts are resolved, and all works cease to bear fruit."<sup>279</sup>

<sup>273</sup> *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā. IV. 30.*

<sup>274</sup> *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā. IV. 98.*

<sup>275</sup> *Chh. Up. VIII. iii. 2.*

<sup>276</sup> *See Br. Up. I. iv. 10.*

<sup>277</sup> *Mu. Up. III. ii. 9.*

<sup>278</sup> *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā. I. 9.*

<sup>279</sup> *Mu. Up. II. ii. 8.*



What happens to a knower of the Self after death? What path does he follow?—What path could he follow? He finds himself everywhere in the whole universe. "The east is the eastern prāna; the south, the southern prāna; the west, the western prāna; the north, the northern prāna; the direction above, the upper prāna; the direction below, the nether prāna; and all the quarters, the different prānas."<sup>280</sup> Whither will the soul of the knower of Ātman go? It does not go to any place where it has not been from the very beginning, nor does it become anything other than what it has always been—that is to say, Brahman, Pure Consciousness.

Unillumined souls go to heaven or return to earth for the satisfaction of their unfulfilled desires. He who desires is reborn. "But the man who does not desire is not reborn. Of him who is without desires, who is free from desires, the objects of whose desire have been attained, and to whom all objects of desire are but the Self—the prānas do not depart. Being but Brahman, he is merged in Brahman. Regarding this there is this verse: 'When all the desires that dwell in his heart are gone, then he, having been mortal, becomes immortal and attains Brahman in this very body.' Just as the lifeless slough of a snake is cast off and lies on an ant-hill, so does his body lie. Then the self becomes disembodied and immortal; it becomes the Supreme Brahman, the Light."<sup>281</sup>

The knower of Ātman is like a man who is awakened from sleep and dreams no more of empty things. He is like a man who, having been sick, is now whole again; he is like a man who, having been blind, has received back his eyesight.

The Knowledge of the Self liberates a man from desire, fear, and death.

"He who sees this does not see death or illness or pain; he who sees this sees everything and obtains everything everywhere."<sup>282</sup>

"He who knows the Bliss of that Brahman, from whence all speech, with the mind, turns away, unable to reach It, fears nothing."<sup>283</sup>

"There is one Supreme Ruler, the inmost Self of all beings, who makes His one form manifold. Eternal happiness belongs to the wise who perceive Him within themselves—not to others."<sup>284</sup>

<sup>280</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. ii. 4.

<sup>281</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 6-7.

<sup>282</sup> *Chh. Up.* VII. xxvi. 2.

<sup>283</sup> *Tat. Up.* II. 9.

<sup>284</sup> *Ka. Up.* II. ii. 12.

"When all the desires that dwell in the heart fall away, then the mortal becomes immortal and here attains Brahman. When all the ties of the heart are severed here on earth, then the mortal becomes immortal—this much alone is the teaching."<sup>285</sup>

"When the Light has risen, there is no day, no night, neither existence nor non-existence; the Blessed One alone is there. That is the eternal, the adorable light of the Sun—and the ancient wisdom proceeded thence."<sup>286</sup>

"As flowing rivers disappear in the sea, losing their names and forms, so a wise man, freed from name and form, attains the Purusha, who is greater than the great."<sup>287</sup>

How does a jivanmukta, a liberated soul, act? How does he move? How does he live? Ordinary minds cannot understand his actions, life, or movements, any more than a dreaming man can see the world of the awakened. The rishis of the Upanishads declare that a jivanmukta is free from desires (akāmayamāna). "The ancient sages, it is said, did not desire children, thinking: What shall we achieve through children—we who have attained this Self, this world? They renounced, it is said, their desire for sons, for wealth, and for the worlds, and lived a mendicant life."<sup>288</sup>

A jivanmukta is no longer vexed by fear: "For what was there to fear? It is from a second entity that fear comes."<sup>289</sup> As he himself is without fear, he does not become a cause of fear to anyone; he regards all beings as projections of himself.

A jivanmukta is free from the illusion of individuality and therefore from the possibility of pain. "He who knows Ātman overcomes grief."<sup>290</sup> "When in the body [thinking this body is I, and I am the body], the Self is held by pleasure and pain; but when He is free from the body [when He knows Himself to be different from the body], neither pleasure nor pain touches Him."<sup>291</sup>

A jivanmukta is free from the binding effects of past action. "All works cease to bear fruit."<sup>292</sup> It is consciousness of individuality that

<sup>285</sup> *Ka. Up.* II. iii. 14-15.

<sup>286</sup> *Śvet. Up.* IV. 18.

<sup>287</sup> *Mu. Up.* III. ii. 8.

<sup>288</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 22.

<sup>289</sup> *Br. Up.* I. iv. 2.

<sup>290</sup> *Chh. Up.* VII. i. 3.

<sup>291</sup> *Chh. Up.* VIII. xii. 1.

<sup>292</sup> *Mu. Up.* II. ii. 8.

impels a man to selfish action, whose good or bad result he must reap at a future date. But the liberated man has realized his individuality as a part of the cosmic illusion and, with the attainment of Knowledge, freed himself from its spell. The awakened person does not reap the fruit of his dream actions.

A liberated man is not given to inactivity, which is a characteristic of *tamas*. He sees action in non-action and non-action in action. Actions do not cling to him. Even while performing actions through his body and senses, he knows his inner Self to be actionless and detached. He knows that the Self is not the doer, but the Witness; It is not the actor, but the Spectator. He can never perform an evil action. All his evil instincts were destroyed when he practised spiritual discipline. Only good comes out of him—and that, too, without any effort. "This is the eternal glory of a knower of Brahman: it never increases or decreases by work. [Therefore] one should know the nature of that alone. Knowing it one is not touched by evil action. Therefore he who knows it as such becomes self-controlled, calm, withdrawn into himself, enduring, and concentrated, and sees the Self in his own body; he sees all as the Self. Evil does not overtake him, but he transcends all evil. Evil does not trouble him, [but] he consumes all evil. He becomes sinless, taintless, free from doubts, and a knower of Brahman."<sup>293</sup>

A liberated soul has attained the blessed state of being free from doubt. "All doubts are resolved."<sup>294</sup> His knowledge of *Ātman* is not based upon intellect but is the result of direct experience. And the illusion, once destroyed, does not come back.

A *jivanmukta* is no longer concerned about bondage or Liberation; for these really do not belong to *Ātman*, the Self ever free. Bondage and Liberation are characteristics of the mind. On account of *māyā* an ignorant person thinks of himself as bound and then strives for Liberation; but *Ātman* is always free. In the inspiring words of Gauḍapāda: "There is neither death nor birth, neither a struggling nor a bound soul, neither a seeker after Liberation nor a liberated one—this, indeed, is the ultimate truth."

<sup>293</sup> *Br. Up.* IV. iv. 23.

<sup>294</sup> *Mu. Up.* II. ii. 8.

# KATHA UPANISHAD

## INTRODUCTION

THE KATHA UPANISHAD is widely read both in the East and in the West. The Knowledge of the Self is here described in a lucid style almost unparalleled in the philosophical writings of the world. Max Müller has said that the French, German, and English translators of the Upanishads regard this treatise as "one of the most perfect specimens of the mystic philosophy and poetry of the ancient Hindus."

The Upanishads form, for the most part, the concluding portions of the Brāhmana section of the Vedas. But the exact relationship of the *Katha Upanishad* to the Vedas is a controversial subject, some associating it with the Sāma-Veda, some with the Yajur-Veda, and others with the Atharva-Veda. The Brāhmana of the Taittiriya Yajur-Veda contains a story of Nachiketā very similar to the one found in the *Katha Upanishad*.

Like all the Upanishads, the *Katha Upanishad* aims at inculcating the Knowledge of Brahman, which alone, according to Vedānta, enables a man to attain Immortality and Freedom. As the subject is profound and difficult to grasp, the Upanishad, following an ancient Hindu method, begins with an illustrative tale.

There once lived a rishi named Vājaśravasa, who performed a sacrifice that required, among other things, the giving away by the sacrificer of all his wealth. He had a son named Nachiketā, who, though young, cherished a reverence for spiritual things. When the cows were brought for distribution among the brāhmins and priests who were to conduct the sacrifice, Nachiketā found them to be old and unfit for any use. Such an unworthy gift, the boy realized, would only bring misery to his father after death. And so, since he was eager to save his father from this impending calamity, he said to him that a son was also property and should be included among the things for distribution. He wished to know, therefore, to whom he was going to be given. Three times he asked the question. But Vājaśravasa was only annoyed by what he regarded as impudence on the part of his son, and he answered angrily that he would give him to Yama, the King of Death.

Nachiketā obeyed his father and proceeded to the abode of Yama. The latter, as the arbiter of man's final destiny and the bestower of punishments and rewards, held a high position among the gods. He was reputed, moreover, to be a teacher of the Knowledge of Brahman.

Yama was away when Nachiketā arrived, and only returned after three days. He sought to make amends for not having been there to receive his worthy guest, and for any discourtesy that might have been shown to him during his absence, by allowing him three boons, one for each night. Nachiketā asked, as the first boon, the allaying both of his father's anger and of his anxiety on account of his son's absence from home. As the second boon, he desired to know the Fire-sacrifice, by which one goes to Brahmāloka, the Plane of Brahmā, and enjoys there a long life of felicity, free from disease and old age, sorrow and fear. Both boons were granted. Then, with the asking of the third boon, the teachings of the Upanishad begin.

Nachiketā wished to know whether or not there was an immortal substance in a man that survived the death of the body. He asked, in other words, for the most treasured secret of the Indo-Āryan wisdom, the secret of Ātman, Its nature, Its origin, and Its destiny.

A teacher, however, must first test the fitness of his pupil, before instructing him in the secret of Ātman. If the latter is to assimilate this Knowledge, he must have cultivated keen discrimination, utter detachment, a sincere longing for Truth, and a tranquil mind. He must have renounced all desire for the perishable pleasures both of earth and of heaven. Therefore Yama offered Nachiketā various temptations, both earthly and celestial, such as sons, grandsons, wealth, cattle, world empire, long life, and heavenly damsels and music. The young aspirant, endowed with a sharp intelligence and calm mind, discarded them all, since he knew them—belonging, as they did, to the mortal order of things—to be impermanent. Since he was a seeker of Immortality, he persisted in his determination to pierce the veil that hides Self-Knowledge. And Yama granted him his desired boon.

Yama taught that the Self in man is none other than the Spirit behind the universe, which is described in the Vedas through the sacred symbol Om. "The knowing Self is not born; It does not die. It has not sprung from anything; nothing has sprung from It. Birthless, eternal, everlasting, and ancient, It is not killed when the body is killed. If the killer thinks he kills and if the killed man thinks he is killed, neither of these apprehends aright. The Self kills not, nor is

It killed." Ātman, the Self, is all-pervading Consciousness and the inner core of all things, great and small. Though dwelling in the body, It is bodiless; though associated with changing things, It is unchanging. One cannot know Ātman either by means of much study or through a keen intellect. When the mind becomes pure through devotion and righteous action, through self-control and contemplation, it then becomes serene and reflects the majesty of Ātman.

Yama, continuing, said that control of the mind and senses, and not their repression, is the most effective spiritual discipline for a man in the attainment of his spiritual goal. The teacher gave the vivid illustration of a chariot, which can take the rider to his destination only when it is well built and when the driver, endowed with discrimination, restrains the impetuous horses by means of strong reins and guides them along the designated roads. Likewise, the body must be healthy; the intellect, free from uncertainty, should control, by means of a strong will, the naturally turbulent sense-organs and allow them to enjoy only those objects that are conducive to spiritual progress.

Further, through meditation the aspirant must acquire inwardness of mind and maintain an unwavering determination that will hold him to his journey till the goal is reached; for the path is sharp as the edge of a razor.

Ātman dwells in the hearts of all and is a man's inmost essence. It animates his physical, vital, and mental activities. It is the unaltered witness of his experiences during waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. Though appearing to be identified with the functions of the body and the mind, It is transcendental. The attributes of the body do not cling to Ātman, just as water does not cling to a lotus leaf.

The Knowledge of the deathless Ātman, which Nachiketā wished to acquire from Yama, is itself Immortality. Immortality is not produced by this Knowledge. Anything that is produced has a beginning and an end and cannot be immortal. The Self always exists, undimmed and undiminished, neither waxing nor waning through a man's good or bad actions. Like the sun, however, It can be hidden by the cloud of ignorance and is revealed when the ignorance is destroyed by Knowledge.

An illumined person, endowed with Self-Knowledge, attains deathlessness, though he may assume or discard a body at will, like a man putting on a garment or taking it off. Self-Knowledge bestows liberation from the suffering of phenomenal existence. When a mortal re-

nounces finite desires, which are created by ignorance and are alien to his Self, he realizes Immortality in this very life. Others remain victims of birth and death in the world of untruth. Therefore anyone desiring Freedom and Immortality should separate the immortal Self from the mortal body with the help of a steady and vigilant mind.

It is reiterated by Vedāntic teachers that the truth of Ātman is revealed when a qualified aspirant, instructed by an illumined teacher, practises the disciplines of self-control, meditation, and inwardness of mind.

S. N.



## ŚRĪ SANKARĀCHĀRYA'S INTRODUCTION

OM. Salutations to the Supreme Lord! Salutations to Yama, the King of Death, the son of Vivasvān,<sup>1</sup> the teacher of the Knowledge of Brahman! Salutations to Nachiketā!

We propose to give a brief commentary on the following chapters comprising the Katha Upanishad, for the easy comprehension of their import.

The word Upanishad is formed by adding the suffix kvip and the prefixes upa and ni to the verbal root sad, which means to loosen, to destroy, and to attain. The word denotes the Knowledge of the Entity (Brahman) sought to be established by the book we are about to explain.

By what etymological process does the word Upanishad signify that Knowledge? We reply: This Knowledge is called Upanishad because it shatters, kills, and destroys avidyā, or ignorance, the seed of saṃsāra,<sup>2</sup> in those seekers after Liberation who, having lost all thirst for objects seen and heard of,<sup>3</sup> approach (upa) the Knowledge designated as Upanishad, to be explained presently, and cultivate it with utter (ni) firmness and devotion.

As will be stated in this Upanishad: "Having realized Ātman, . . . one is freed from the jaws of death." (I. iii. 15.)

Or the Knowledge of Brahman, Brahmagvidyā, is termed Upanishad because it is a means to the attainment of Brahman. It enables seekers of Liberation who are endowed with the above-mentioned dispassion to attain the Supreme Brahman. As will be stated later: Having received

<sup>1</sup> The sun god.

<sup>2</sup> The ever changing relative universe characterized by life and death, pain and pleasure, love and hate, and the other pairs of opposites.

<sup>3</sup> Dispassion is one of the important prerequisites for the attainment of Liberation. It consists in controlling the thirst for the objects of enjoyment seen in this world and also for those about which one reads in the scriptures, which are enjoyed in heaven after death.

this wisdom . . . Nachiketā became free from impurities and death." (II. iii. 18.)

Or lastly, the Knowledge of Fire, Agnividya, is called Upanishad because the verbal root sad also means to loosen. The Knowledge of Fire, the first-born and omniscient offspring of Brahman (the Knowledge that was sought by Nachiketā as his second boon) leads to the attainment of Heaven and thereby loosens the possibility of such misery as repeated dwelling in a womb, birth, and old age, which one experiences in other planes of existence. As will be stated later: "The inhabitants of Heaven attain immortality." (I. i. 13.)

The objection may be raised that students apply the word Upanishad even to the book: one hears such statements as "We study the Upanishad" and "We teach the Upanishad." In answer it may be said that there is no fault in such use of the word. The meaning of the verbal root sad, as has already been stated, is the destruction of avidyā, the cause of saṃsāra. This is possible only through Knowledge and not merely through a book. But the book, also, serves the same purpose, namely, the establishment of the Knowledge of Brahman; it is therefore properly designated by this name. For instance, one uses such an expression as "The clarified butter is, verily, life."<sup>4</sup> Therefore the word Upanishad means primarily Knowledge, and secondarily the book.

By this etymological interpretation of the Upanishad are stated the qualifications of those who are competent for Knowledge.<sup>5</sup> The subject matter of the Upanishad is the Supreme Brahman, the inmost Self of all. The purpose served by the Upanishad is the attainment of Brahman, which brings about the complete cessation of saṃsāra. This purpose also indicates the relationship between the book and its subject matter: the former is the explainer and the latter is the thing explained. The following chapters reveal as clearly as an apple lying in one's hand

<sup>4</sup> The meaning is that the clarified butter nourishes life.

<sup>5</sup> For the attainment of the Knowledge described in the Upanishads, certain qualifications are necessary. The following are the four qualifications with which a student of Vedānta must be endowed when approaching a teacher for instruction in the Knowledge of Brahman: (a) discrimination (viveka) between the Real and the unreal, (b) renunciation (vairāgyam) of the unreal, (c) a group of six virtues, namely, calmness of mind (śama), withdrawal of the sense-organs from their objects (dama), keeping the mind undisturbed by external objects (uparati), patient bearing of all afflictions (titikṣhā), faith in the words of the teacher (śraddhā), and self-settledness, or unceasing concentration of the mind on Brahman (samādhāna), and (d) longing for Freedom (mumukṣhutā).

*the knowledge concerning the competency of students, the subject matter, the purpose, and the relationship.*<sup>6</sup>

*Now we shall proceed to explain the book to the best of our understanding.*

<sup>6</sup> The interest of a pupil in studying a scripture is stimulated if he is informed of the subject matter, the precise relationship of the book to the subject matter, and the purpose served by its study. Therefore a scripture discusses these points at the very outset. To these, writers on Vedānta add a fourth point, namely, the qualifications of a competent pupil. These are the four indispensable factors treated of in all authoritative Vedāntic treatises. Śankarāchārya mentions them in his introduction in order to demonstrate that the *Katha Upanishad* is a proper treatise on the Vedānta philosophy.

## INVOCATION

**Om. May Brahman protect us both! May Brahman bestow upon us both the fruit of Knowledge! May we both obtain the energy to acquire Knowledge! May what we both study reveal the Truth! May we cherish no ill feeling toward each other!**

**Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!**

**PROTECT:** By revealing the true nature of Knowledge.

**BOTH:** The preceptor and the disciple.

**ILL FEELING ETC:** Owing to unclear instruction on the part of the preceptor or imperfect understanding on the part of the disciple. The idea is: May there be no ill feeling between us on account of any mistake committed by the one or the other, through carelessness or for some other reason.

**PEACE:** The word is thrice repeated in order to remove the three possible obstacles that both the teacher and the disciple may meet with, namely, physical illness, natural calamity, and injury from harmful animals.

The Supreme Lord is invoked at the commencement and the termination of the study of the Vedas and other scriptures for the removal of all faults committed intentionally, unintentionally, carelessly, or through excitement, oversight, or non-observance of the proper rules.

## CHAPTER I

**VĀJAŚRAVASA**, desiring rewards, performed the Viśvajit sacrifice, in which he gave away all his property. He had a son named Nachiketā.

**VĀJAŚRAVASA**: The name of a rishi who lived in Vedic times.

**REWARDS**: To be reaped in a heavenly world after death.

**VIŚVAJIT**: A sacrifice in which the sacrificer is required to give away all his property to the priests and other brāhmins.

### 2-3

When the gifts were being distributed, faith entered into the heart of Nachiketā, who was still a boy. He said to himself: Joyless, surely, are the worlds to which he goes who gives away cows no longer able to drink, to eat, to give milk, or to calve.

**FAITH**: The Sanskrit word śraddhā means an intuitive belief in the existence of a Reality underlying the universe. Hence it also signifies faith in the words of the scriptures and of a qualified preceptor: both teach the reality of Brahman and the immortality of the Soul. Śraddhā is an affirmative attitude of mind as opposed to a sceptical and negative one. This basic spiritual virtue includes humility, sincerity, earnestness, single-mindedness, reverence, and an unwavering determination to find out the truth at any cost. Endowed with it, the aspirant does not shrink from any risk or difficulty. Possessed of such faith, Nachiketā, as will be seen later, entered the Abode of Death and spurned all temptations for the sake of truth. The term does not signify a mechanical belief in the words of a man or book.

**Boy**: The word conveys the idea that Nachiketā was on the threshold of youth and led the life of a brahmachārin, observing the vow of celibacy and continence. His body and mind were fresh, young, vigorous, and untainted by worldliness. According to the Vedas, such a person is pre-eminently qualified for the Knowledge of Brahman.

Evidently Nachiketā's father was giving away only old, decrepit, and useless cows which would not do any good to their receivers. For making

such a gift he would go to unhappy worlds after death. The first effect of śraddhā on Nachiketā was a desire to save his father from suffering.

*Nachiketā thought that, as a dutiful son, he must ward off the harmful consequences which would befall his father for giving away useless cows at the sacrifice. For that purpose he was willing to give up even his own life.*

## 4

He said to his father: Father! To whom will you give me? He said this a second and a third time. Then his father replied: Unto death I will give you.

**GIVE ME:** The rules of this particular sacrifice demanded the giving away of all possessions. The son is a possession of his father. Nachiketā wanted to know to which priest or brāhmin he would be given away. He did not want his father to deviate from truth. Śraddhā, or faith, had created in Nachiketā's mind an unflagging devotion to truth.

**UNTO DEATH ETC:** Twice the father did not pay any attention to what he considered to be impertinence on the part of the boy. At last he lost his temper and told him to go to death.

*The father, having once spoken, though in anger, had to be true to his word and sacrifice his son. Nachiketā reflected long on the words of his father and said to himself:*

## 5

Among many I am the first; or among many I am the middlemost. [But certainly I am never the last.] What purpose of the King of Death will my father serve today by thus giving me away to him?

**MANY:** Disciples or sons.

**FIRST:** The best disciple or son anticipates the wishes of the teacher or father and fulfils them.

**MIDDLEMOST:** Such a disciple awaits his superior's expressed wishes before he acts.

**LAST:** The inferior disciple or son does not carry out the command of his superior even when ordered.

**WHAT PURPOSE ETC:** Evidently it was not the real intention of the father to see his son die. He had uttered the words in anger.

*Nachiketā realized in no time his father's plight but did not want him to go back on his word. In the meantime the father, too, had begun to lament his hasty statement. The son consoled him.*

## 6

*Nachiketā said:* Look back and see how it was with those who came before us, and observe how it is with those who are now with us. A mortal ripens like corn, and like corn he springs up again.

How IT WAS ETC: Nachiketā indicated that neither his forefathers nor the righteous people of his own time ever deviated from truth, and that only wicked people practised falsehood.

RIPENS: When corn is ripe, either it falls to the ground or it is cut away.

SPRINGS UP: When it is sown again the next season.

No real or permanent benefit is derived from falsehood. Men are mortal. They follow the cycle of birth and death, like corn. When corn is ripe it is cut away and garnered; it is sown again the next season. Then it springs up as new plants. Therefore Nachiketā asked his father to follow truth and send him to the Abode of Death.

*Rishi Vājaśravasa sent his son to Yama, the King of Death, to keep his word. When Nachiketā arrived, Yama was away. He spent three nights there without taking food. When Yama returned he was informed of it by his ministers and others. They said to him:*

## 7

Verily, like fire a brāhmin guest enters a house; the householder pacifies him by giving him water and a seat. Bring him water, O King of Death!

FIRE: If a brāhmin is not shown proper hospitality, he consumes, like fire, the happiness of the family to which he has come as a guest.

BRĀHMIN: Because the brāhmins were the custodians of the spiritual culture of the Indo-Āryans, they were treated with great respect in Hindu society.

GUEST: Respect for a guest is a time-honoured custom in India. He is regarded by the Hindus as a veritable manifestation of God.

GIVING HIM ETC: In a hot country like India, water is offered to a guest for washing his feet; then a seat; and then food.

*The harm that befell a householder for being inhospitable to a guest was described by Yama's ministers:*

## 8

The brāhmin who dwells in a house, fasting, destroys that foolish householder's hopes and expectations, the reward of his intercourse with pious people, the merit of his kindly speech, the good results of his sacrifices and beneficial deeds, and his cattle and children as well.

**HOPES:** For wished-for objects unseen but attainable, such as enjoyments in heaven.

**EXPECTATIONS:** For objects both seen and attainable, such as wealth, horses, cattle, children.

**BENEFICIAL DEEDS:** Works of public welfare, such as the digging of wells, the planting of fruit trees by the roadside, and the building of high-ways and rest-houses.

The meaning is that a guest must under no circumstances be slighted.

*Being thus addressed by his ministers, the King of Death approached Nachiketā and worshipped him.*

## 9

*Yama said:* O brāhmin, salutations to you! You are a venerable guest and have dwelt in my house three nights without eating; therefore choose now three boons, one for each night, O brāhmin! May all be well with me!

**CHOOSE:** The King of Death knew that Nachiketā would be gracious enough to forgive him this unintentional offence; yet he wanted to please his guest in every way.

*As the first boon, Nachiketā asked Yama to remove his father's worry and bring about his happiness.*

## 10

*Nachiketā said:* O Death, may Gautama, my father, be calm, cheerful, and free from anger toward me! May he recognize me and greet me when I shall have been sent home by you! This I choose as the first of the three boons.



**CALM:** Free from worry regarding Nachiketā's welfare in the Abode of Death.

*The boon was granted.*

# 11

**Yama said:** Through my favour, your father, Auddālaki Āruni, will recognize you and be again toward you as he was before. After having seen you freed from the jaws of death, he will sleep peacefully at night and bear no anger against you.

**BEAR NO ANGER ETC:** The father had been angry at what he thought to be Nachiketā's impudent conduct at the time of the sacrifice.

*As the second boon, Nachiketā asked Yama to teach him the sacrifice that enabled its performer to go to Brahmaloka and enjoy immortality.*

# 12-13

**Nachiketā said:** In the Heavenly World there is no fear whatsoever. You, O Death, are not there, and no one is afraid of old age. Leaving behind both hunger and thirst, and out of the reach of sorrow, all rejoice in Heaven.

You know, O Death, the Fire-sacrifice, which leads to Heaven. Explain it to me, for I am full of faith. The inhabitants of Heaven attain immortality. This I ask as my second boon.

**HEAVENLY WORLD:** The phrase refers to Brahmaloka.

**FEAR:** Due to sickness, old age, and so on. The King of Death has power only over the inhabitants of earth, and none whatsoever over those of Brahmaloka.

**IMMORTALITY:** Relative immortality. Compared to the life of people on earth, the life enjoyed by the inhabitants of Brahmaloka is very long; yet it is very short from the standpoint of Brahman.

According to the Vedas, those who dwell in Brahmaloka are free from old age and death. Living on nectar and ambrosia, they do not experience thirst and hunger. They are not victims of sorrow, fear, and the other limitations of earthly life.

## 14

*Yama said:* I know well the Fire-sacrifice, which leads to Heaven, and I will explain it to you. Listen to me. Know this Fire to be the means of attaining Heaven. It is the support of the universe; it is hidden in the hearts of the wise.

**SUPPORT ETC:** One form of the Fire is Virāt, which is the totality of the material bodies seen in the universe. Virāt is the body of the World Person. (See p. 68.)

**HEARTS:** The secret of this sacrifice is revealed only to the intellects of wise men. The intellect is usually located by Vedāntic mystics in the heart.

Non-dualistic Vedānta states that Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, is free from attributes and actions. Through māyā It appears to be associated with attributes. Then It becomes known as Saguna Brahman, who is the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the universe. Saguna Brahman roughly corresponds to the Personal God of the Dualistic religions. He is also known, according to His different aspects and functions, by such epithets as Hiranyagarbha (the Golden Egg), Brahmā (the World Soul), Sutrātmā (the Ātman, or Soul, which holds together all things, like the thread of a garland), Agni (Fire), Prāna (Life), and Virāt (the Cosmic Person). He is immanent in the creation, but at the same time He is the Lord of Brahmaloṇa, the highest plane in the relative universe. Those fortunate human beings who worship Saguna Brahman with whole-souled devotion go, after death, to Brahmaloṇa and enjoy there great felicity on account of their participation in the cosmic life of Brahmā. They live there till the end of the cycle and afterwards, together with Brahmā, realize their identity with Brahman, or the Absolute. According to the Vedic seers, two other classes of men, namely, those who have performed one hundred Horse-sacrifices and those who have lived all their lives as brahmachāris without entering into the life of sannyāsa, also go to Brahmaloṇa. On account of their imperfect knowledge, however, they return to earth after the enjoyment of the fruit of their meritorious actions is over. Other householders, who perform the prescribed duties of life and participate in humanitarian works, go after death to a lower heaven called Chandraloṇa and enjoy celestial happiness. After the exhaustion of the results of their actions they return to earth. The inhabitants of the heavenly worlds are called devas, or gods. Though the happiness in Brahmaloṇa or any other heaven far exceeds that of earth, it is nevertheless a relative happiness. The immortality enjoyed by the gods is also relative. True Immortality, as taught in the Upanishads, is attained here on earth through the Knowledge of the

Self. According to Vedānta, earth, heaven, and the other planes are different manifestations of Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, in time and space.

*The Fire-sacrifice explained:*

## 15

Yama then told him about the Fire, which is the source of the worlds, and what bricks were to be gathered for the altar, and how many, and how the sacrificial fire was to be lighted. Nachiketā, too, repeated all this as it had been told him. Then Yama, being pleased with him, spoke again.

SOURCE: Fire, in the form of Virāt, is the first to be created at the beginning of the cycle.

WHAT BRICKS ETC: That is to say, what kind of bricks.

HOW MANY: The number of bricks is seven hundred and twenty, which is the same as the number of days and nights in a year of three hundred and sixty days.

*The King of Death wanted to grant Nachiketā a supplementary boon.*

## 16

High-souled Death, being well pleased, said to Nachiketā: I will now give you another boon: this Fire shall be named after you. Take also from me this many-coloured chain.

WELL PLEASED: Because Nachiketā had demonstrated that he had all the qualifications of a true disciple.

MANY-COLOURED CHAIN: A chain of precious stones of many colours. Or the words may mean the knowledge of karma, or action, which leads to diverse results.

*The King of Death then described the fruit of the Nachiketā sacrifice:*

## 17

He who has performed three times this Nachiketā sacrifice, having been instructed by the three, and also has performed his three duties, overcomes birth and death. Having known this Fire born of Brahman,

omniscient, luminous, and adorable, and realized it, he attains supreme peace.

**THREE TIMES:** The words in the text may also mean: "having studied, learned, and performed the sacrifice."

**INSTRUCTED BY THE THREE:** One is instructed by one's mother before being invested with the sacred thread, by one's father while studying the Vedas, and finally by one's teacher. A second meaning is: "having been instructed in the Vedas and the Smritis and by virtuous men"; and a third meaning: "having acquired knowledge through direct evidence, inference, and the scriptures." Knowledge acquired through these means purifies the heart and becomes fruitful.

**THREE DUTIES:** These are study of the scriptures, performance of sacrifices, and giving of alms.

**LUMINOUS:** The literal meaning of the word deva, in the text, which is generally translated as "god."

**REALIZED:** As his own self.

**SUPREME PEACE:** The highest peace in the relative world.

The performer of the Nachiketā sacrifice attains to the plane of Virāt, or Brahmaloka, and becomes a part of Virāt, who controls the universe. The discipline by which this exalted position is realized combines knowledge with action. Ultimate Liberation, however, is attained only through the Knowledge of Brahman.

*Yama concluded the topic of the Nachiketā sacrifice:*

## 18

He who, having known the three, has performed three times the Nachiketā sacrifice, throws off, even here, the chains of death, overcomes grief, and rejoices in Heaven.

**THE THREE:** Namely, the kinds of bricks required for the altar, their number, and the way to light the sacrificial fire.

**HAS PERFORMED ETC:** At the time of the sacrifice, the sacrificer meditates on the Fire as one with himself.

**EVEN HERE:** Before the death of the body.

**CHAINS OF DEATH:** That is to say, vice, ignorance, attachment, hatred, and the rest, which make one a victim of repeated deaths.

**REJOICES IN HEAVEN:** Having attained the status of Virāt and participated in His cosmic life.

The result of the Nachiketā sacrifice, when performed according to the

prescribed rules, is the attainment of the plane of Virāt, where one communes with Saguna Brahman, or Brahman with attributes. (See note on I. i. 14.)

*Yama now was ready to offer Nachiketā the last of his three promised boons.*

## 19

This, O Nachiketā, is your Fire-sacrifice, which leads to Heaven and which you have chosen as your second boon. People will call this Fire by your name. Now, O Nachiketā, choose the third boon.

Because of his promise to grant three boons to Nachiketā, Yama still considered himself a debtor; therefore he asked the boy to select the third boon and absolve him from the debt.

*The Mantra and Brāhmana sections of the Vedas, known as the Karmakānda, which deal with sacrifice and other ritualistic actions, lay down various mandatory and prohibitory injunctions. The first two boons asked by Nachiketā fell within the scope of those sections. The Karmakānda does not deal with the true knowledge of the nature of Ātman. This is discussed in the Upanishads, which form the Jñānakānda, or philosophical portion of the Vedas. The mandatory and prohibitory injunctions apply only to those who, under the spell of ignorance, associate such illusory notions with Ātman as that It is the doer of action and that It is the enjoyer of its fruit. Ignorance of the nature of Ātman is the cause of saṃsāra, or repeated births and deaths in the relative universe. This ignorance can be destroyed with the help of true Knowledge, which reveals the identity of Ātman and Brahman and is characterized by an utter absence of illusory superimpositions. The remainder of the Katha Upanishad is devoted to a discussion of this Knowledge, the bestower of the Highest Good. Even the felicity of Brahmaloṇa, which was attained through the second boon, is not the same as true Immortality. This is made possible only through the Self-Knowledge sought in the third boon. Thus the story leads to a discussion of Ātman.*

## 20

*Nachiketā said:* There is this doubt about a man when he is dead: Some say that he exists; others, that he does not. This I should like to know, taught by you. This is the third of my boons.

**THAT HE EXISTS:** That is to say, that there is in man an indestructible element which is different from the body, the senses, the mind, and the buddhi, or discriminative faculty, and which assumes another body after death.

**THIS I SHOULD ETC:** The attainment of the supreme goal of life is dependent upon Self-Knowledge.

**TAUGHT BY YOU:** Because even if such an Ātman exists, It cannot be known either through the sense-organs or by inference. Only a qualified teacher can impart Self-Knowledge.

The first two boons chosen by Nachiketā apply to an unilluminated person, conscious of such notions as duty, happiness, the here, and the hereafter. According to a Vedic injunction, such a person should fulfil his moral and religious obligations in order to purify his heart. When he finds the happiness of the relative universe, including that of Brahmaloka, to be transitory, he then becomes entitled to cultivate Self-Knowledge. Nachiketā will presently be offered by the King of Death various earthly and celestial objects which ignorant people crave for, and it will be pointed out that these are obstacles to Self-Knowledge.

*The acquisition of Self-Knowledge requires austere spiritual discipline. Such Knowledge can be acquired only by those who are detached from all material desires and objects. The King of Death wanted to be convinced of Nachiketā's seriousness and determination and subjected him to severe tests.*

## 21

**Yama said:** On this subject even the gods formerly had their doubts. It is not easy to understand: the nature of Ātman is subtle. Choose another boon, O Nachiketā! Do not press me. Release me from that boon.

**NOT EASY ETC:** Even though explained again and again, it is unintelligible to ordinary minds.

*The disciple was unwavering in his determination.*

## 22

**Nachiketā said:** O Death, even the gods have their doubts about this subject; and you have declared it to be not easy to understand. But another teacher like you cannot be found, and surely no other boon is comparable to this.

**LIKE YOU:** Yama, the King of Death, holds a very high position among the Hindu gods. He is the personification of dharma, or righteousness, and of self-control. Because of his supreme detachment he is given the power of deciding men's destiny after death.

**NO OTHER BOON:** Self-Knowledge alone bestows upon man the Highest Good. All other forms of knowledge produce transitory results.

*Next the King of Death tested Nachiketā by offering him various worldly pleasures.*

## 23

**YAMA SAID:** Choose sons and grandsons who shall live a hundred years; choose elephants, horses, herds of cattle, and gold. Choose a vast domain on earth; live here as many years as you desire.

**LIVE HERE ETC:** For a short-lived person earthly enjoyments too quickly pass; to make his suggestion seem worth accepting, Yama offers Nachiketā an endless period of enjoyment.

## 24

If you deem any other boon equal to that, choose it; choose wealth and a long life. Be the king, O Nachiketā, of the wide earth. I will make you the enjoyer of all desires.

**THAT:** Described in the preceding verse.

**ALL DESIRES:** Both earthly and celestial.

## 25

Whatever desires are difficult to satisfy in this world of mortals, choose them as you wish: these fair maidens, with their chariots and musical instruments—men cannot obtain them. I give them to you and they shall wait upon you. But do not ask me about death.

**DO NOT ASK ETC:** To a seeker after tangible happiness, asking about the hereafter of the soul is as unprofitable as "examining the teeth of a crow."

*Though tempted with these alluring objects, Nachiketā remained unperturbed, like the serene depths of the ocean.*

## 26

*Nachiketā said:* But, O Death, these endure only till tomorrow. Furthermore, they exhaust the vigour of all the sense-organs. Even the longest life is short indeed. Keep your horses, dances, and songs for yourself.

**ENDURE ETC:** That is to say, all material enjoyments are transitory.

**EXHAUST:** By the enjoyment of sense pleasures a man gradually loses his dharma, virility, wisdom, strength, and fame. Therefore in the end they are harmful.

**EVEN THE LONGEST ETC:** Everything that exists in time and space is subject to birth, growth, decay, and death. A god may live longer than a man, and Brahmā, the Creator, may live longest of all; but when the universe comes to an end at the conclusion of the cycle, men and gods disappear. Ātman alone is beyond time and space; hence It is immortal. Compared to the Immortality of Ātman, even Brahmā's span of life is as momentary as the blinking of the eyes. Immortality (Amritatvam) is the real nature of man, and its attainment is the conscious or unconscious goal of his efforts. Since Nachiketā was a seeker after Immortality, he could not remain satisfied with anything existing in time and space and governed by the law of causation.

*Furthermore:*

## 27

Wealth can never make a man happy. Moreover, since I have beheld you, I shall certainly obtain wealth; I shall also live as long as you rule. Therefore no boon will be accepted by me but the one that I have asked.

**WEALTH ETC:** It is well known that a man earns money through untiring labour and great suffering yet does not derive from it enduring satisfaction.

**SINCE I HAVE ETC:** Since Nachiketā had found favour with Yama, he would have both wealth and a long life, if he so desired.

## 28

Who among decaying mortals here below, having approached the undecaying immortals and coming to know that his higher needs may be fulfilled by them, would exult in a life over long, after he had pondered on the pleasures arising from beauty and song?



**UNDECAYING:** The gods are free from old age and infirmity, though subject to eventual death.

**HIGHER NEEDS:** To one seeking Immortality the cultivation of knowledge, discrimination, and renunciation are more desirable than wealth. When the gods are propitiated they can bestow upon man spiritual virtues.

**EXULT ETC:** A man must eventually part with his material possessions. The longer he enjoys them, the more regrets he feels at the moment of parting.

**PONDERED:** A thoughtful man realizes that worldly pleasures are nothing but transitory sensations resulting from contact of the sense-organs with their objects. They cannot save him from decay and death.

These and the previous verses show how deeply Nachiketā was impressed by the ephemeral nature of all enjoyment on earth and in heaven. His longing for Liberation through Self-Knowledge was intense indeed.

*Nachiketā could not be tempted by worldly enjoyment.*

29

Tell me, O Death, of that Great Hereafter about which a man has his doubts.

Nachiketā will surely not choose any other boon but the one so wrapped in mystery.

**GREAT HEREAFTER:** Eternity. The knowledge of the eternal nature of the Soul alone confers the highest felicity on a man.

The second sentence of this verse is a statement of the scripture and not of Nachiketā.

*Here ends Chapter One  
of Part One of the  
Katha Upanishad.*

## CHAPTER II

**YAMA SAID:** The good is one thing; the pleasant, another. Both of these, serving different needs, bind a man. It goes well with him who, of the two, takes the good; but he who chooses the pleasant misses the end.

**GOOD:** The Highest Good.

**THE PLEASANT:** Sense pleasures enjoyed through wealth, wife, children, and other material objects.

**DIFFERENT NEEDS:** Leading their devotees to the different goals of Liberation and bondage.

**BIND A MAN:** The text refers to unilluminated persons belonging to the various stages of life and engaged in the performance of what they consider to be their duties. Some among them seek pleasure, and some, the Highest Good, or Liberation, according to their respective spiritual evolution. The former pursue avidyā, or the lower knowledge, and the latter, Vidyā, or the Higher Knowledge. So both are said to be bound by their respective sense of duty. Even the striving after Liberation indicates a state of bondage. For an illumined person, who has realized the full freedom of the Self, there are no strivings, no duties, no obligations—such as the practice of meditation or the observance of spiritual vows. He is free from all the bondage of the relative world.

**GOES WELL:** Because the ideal of the good confers ultimately the Highest Good.

**OF THE TWO:** Namely, the good and the pleasant. They are mutually opposed and cannot be pursued simultaneously by anyone.

**END:** Self-Knowledge, which is the supreme end of human effort.

*It is within the power of every man to choose either of the two ideals; but the majority cling to worldly pleasures. They are indeed short-sighted and devoid of judgement.*

Both the good and the pleasant present themselves to a man. The calm soul examines them well and discriminates. Yea, he prefers the

good to the pleasant; but the fool chooses the pleasant out of greed and avarice.

**CALM SOUL:** This calmness is the result of discrimination between the Real and the unreal.

**DISCRIMINATES:** Like a swan separating milk from a mixture of milk and water, or an ant sifting sugar from a mixture of sugar and sand.

**PREFERS ETC:** Because, from the standpoint of man's ultimate welfare, the good far outweighs the pleasant.

**OUT OF GREED ETC:** That is to say, the fool is impelled by the motive of greed and avarice. He seeks material things for the nourishment and protection of his body.

Most people are devoid of the power of discrimination. They are swayed by greed and attachment. Therefore they prefer worldly pleasures to spiritual bliss.

*Again the King of Death spoke highly of Nachiketā's discrimination and detachment:*

### 3

O Nachiketā, after pondering well the pleasures that are or seem to be delightful, you have renounced them all. You have not taken the road abounding in wealth, where many men sink.

**THAT ARE:** Tangible objects of pleasure like wealth and relatives.

**SEEM TO BE ETC:** Such as celestial maidens and other objects in heaven.

**ROAD ETC:** Worldly people follow this road and sink, alas, in the mire. Material happiness was offered to Nachiketā in its most tempting form.

*It has been said that it goes well with the follower of the good and that the follower of the pleasant misses the end. Why so?*

### 4

Wide apart and leading to different ends are these two: ignorance and what is known as Knowledge. I regard you, O Nachiketā, to be one who desires Knowledge; for even many pleasures could not tempt you away.

**WIDE APART:** The two paths of the pleasant and the good, being of the nature of ignorance and Knowledge, are mutually exclusive, like darkness and light.

**DIFFERENT ENDS:** That is to say, bondage and Freedom.

**TEMPT YOU AWAY:** From the path of the good, by making Nachiketā succumb to worldly enjoyment.

*The King of Death condemned ignorance by pointing out its evil result.*

## 5

Fools dwelling in darkness, but thinking themselves wise and erudite, go round and round, by various tortuous paths, like the blind led by the blind.

**DWELLING IN DARKNESS:** That is to say, enchained by myriads of thirsts for worldly objects.

**WISE:** Endowed with worldly wisdom.

**ERUDITE:** Well versed in the letter of the scriptures.

**GO ROUND AND ROUND:** That is to say, after death they are forced to assume different bodies, good and evil, all resulting from their ignorance.

**BY VARIOUS ETC:** These crooked paths are characterized by old age, suffering, and death.

*These fools are deprived of the knowledge of the Great Hereafter.*

## 6

The Hereafter never reveals itself to a person devoid of discrimination, heedless, and perplexed by the delusion of wealth. "This world alone exists," he thinks, "and there is no other." Again and again he comes under my sway.

**HEREAFTER:** The knowledge of the soul's existence after the destruction of the body. The word also signifies certain spiritual disciplines such as the repetition and meditation of Om, by means of which one may enjoy peace and blessedness in Brahmaloṇa or even realize one's identity with Brahman.

**PERSON ETC:** A foolish person, endowed with the undeveloped mind of a child.

**HEEDLESS:** Distracted by attachment to worldly possessions.

**PERPLEXED:** Like a man in dense darkness.

**THIS WORLD:** The sense-perceived world.

**AGAIN AND AGAIN ETC:** That is to say, he passes through endless births and deaths.

Such is the fate of men in general.

*Few and far between are those who seek Self-Knowledge.*

## 7

Many there are who do not even hear of Ātman; though hearing of Him, many do not comprehend. Wonderful is the expounder and rare the hearer; rare indeed is the experiencer of Ātman taught by an able preceptor.

**EXPOUNDER:** Only a man who has directly realized the Self can teach one about It.

**HEARER:** A seeker endowed with the necessary qualifications. (See pp. 12 and 114.)

According to Vedānta, a man who has performed righteous actions in many previous lives develops, in his present birth, a spirit of renunciation for material objects and manifests a keen longing for the Knowledge of Ātman. Three things are indeed very rare: birth in a human body, the longing for spiritual freedom, and the guidance of an able teacher.

*The Self cannot be known when taught by one who is merely erudite in the letter of the scriptures but who has not realized their essence.*

## 8

Ātman, when taught by an inferior person, is not easily comprehended, because It is diversely regarded by disputants. But when It is taught by him who has become one with Ātman, there can remain no more doubt about It. Ātman is subtler than the subtlest and not to be known through argument.

**INFERIOR PERSON:** A man of worldly understanding, who identifies the Self with such physical objects as the body, senses, mind, or ego.

**DIVERSELY ETC:** People who try to determine the nature of Ātman by argument often describe It by such contradictory characteristics as existent or non-existent and pure or impure.

**WHEN IT IS TAUGHT ETC:** The following is an adaptation of Śankara's commentary regarding several alternative explanations of the sentence:

"How is Ātman well comprehended? The answer is as follows: If Ātman is taught by a preceptor who himself is free from the illusion of duality and who has become one with Brahman, then all doubts—such as whether

Ātman exists or not and whether or not It is the doer—disappear. It is the very nature of the Knowledge of Ātman to put an end to all doubts.

"Or the text may be construed thus: When Ātman, which is the inmost Self of a man and in no way other than the Supreme Self, is taught, there remains nothing else to be known; for there exists no other knowable object. The realization of the oneness of Ātman is the consummation of knowledge. Therefore, since there is nothing else to be known, knowledge stops here.

"Or: When the pupil is taught that Ātman is non-different from Brahman, he does not come back to earth, because Liberation immediately follows this knowledge.

"Or: When a preceptor who has known himself to be one with Brahman teaches the pupil that he is none other than Brahman, the pupil cannot remain ignorant about Brahman. That is to say, the pupil, like the teacher, realizes himself to be identical with Brahman."

ĀTMAN IS SUBTLER ETC: Ātman should be taught by a preceptor who has realized his oneness with Brahman. Otherwise It seems to be inscrutable, since It is subtler than the subtlest thing.

NOT TO BE KNOWN ETC: Ātman cannot be proved by mere argument. No finality about a supramental entity can be reached by mere argumentation. A disputant's opinion based upon reasoning reflects only the state of his mind. Ātman transcends all mental states.

### *The way to attain Self-Knowledge:*

#### 9

This Knowledge cannot be attained by reasoning. Ātman becomes easy of comprehension, O dearest, when taught by another. You have attained this Knowledge now. You are, indeed, a man of true resolve. May we always have an inquirer like you!

THIS KNOWLEDGE: Regarding Ātman, established by the seers and the scriptures and taught by a preceptor who has realized his oneness with the Supreme Self.

BY REASONING: A man dependent upon mere intellectual reasoning, and inexperienced in the true import of the scriptures, will tend to associate the Self with some notion of his impure mind.

ANOTHER: That is to say, a preceptor who is not a mere intellectual philosopher but a man of Self-realization. According to the Upanishads, the Knowledge of the Self cannot be obtained without the help of a qualified teacher.

INQUIRER: The word may mean either disciple or son. According to a

Vedic injunction, the knowledge of the Vedas should be transmitted to a qualified son or disciple.

Ātman, or the Self, is known only by a direct and immediate experience. Being Pure Consciousness, It can never, like tangible objects, be perceived by the sense-organs. Because It is transcendental, It cannot be known by inference. Only when the mind becomes inward and calm through rigid self-control and concentration does Ātman reveal Itself to a man in his inmost awareness. Those who try to understand It by means of argumentation never succeed. But the Upanishads do not condemn Vedāntic reasoning, which a competent student should employ to grasp the instruction of his teacher.

*Yama praised Nachiketā's great wisdom because the latter had rejected even the offer of a heavenly position. The King of Death himself, though aware of its impermanence, had sought by means of sacrificial worship the position of a god.*

# 10

*Yama said:* I know that the treasure resulting from action is not eternal; for what is eternal cannot be obtained by the non-eternal. Yet I have performed the Nachiketā sacrifice with the help of non-eternal things and attained this position which is [only relatively] eternal.

**TREASURE:** That is to say, the result of karma. As a man seeks treasure, so also he seeks a reward for righteous action.

**WHAT IS ETERNAL:** The Supreme Self.

**CANNOT BE OBTAINED ETC:** The effect is destroyed when the momentum of the cause comes to an end. It does not exist prior to its manifestation. It has a beginning and an end.

**YET:** The force of the word is that though Yama knew the eternal Ātman could not be realized through non-eternal means, yet he employed non-eternal means to obtain the position of a god in heaven.

**NON-ETERNAL THINGS:** Such accessories of sacrifice as animals, butter, and barley.

**POSITION ETC:** That is to say, the position of a god, the King of Death. The life of a god is eternal in comparison with a man's life on earth, but it is non-eternal from the standpoint of the Absolute.

*The Knowledge of Brahman is possible only for him who has renounced all the enjoyments of the relative universe, including those of Brahmaloṇa, or the Highest Heaven.*

## 11

The fulfilment of desires, the foundation of the universe, the endless rewards of sacrifices, the shore where there is no fear, that which is adorable and great, the wide abode, and the goal—all this you have seen; and being wise, you have with firm resolve discarded everything.

**THE FULFILMENT ETC:** All a man's relative desires find their culmination in the happiness of Brahmaloka.

**FOUNDATION ETC:** Brahmā, the controlling deity of Brahmaloka, is the World Soul.

**ENDLESS:** That is to say, from the relative point of view.

**SHORE ETC:** Again, from the relative point of view. One who has attained to Brahmaloka is free from the fear of old age, disease, and death, which are the lot of mortals on earth. Yet this is not real Freedom.

**GREAT:** Endowed with many supernatural powers.

**WIDE:** Lasting for years without number.

**GOAL:** The place where one enjoys unsurpassable happiness.

All the objects described in the text belong to Brahmaloka. But though they had been offered to Nachiketā as a boon by Yama, he had firmly refused them. He was indeed a rare seeker after Self-Knowledge.

*The King of Death praised Ātman in order to extol Nachiketā's wisdom. Ātman is distinct from the body, the senses, and the mind; the Knowledge of It puts an end to a man's attachment to the world and enables him to attain Supreme Bliss.*

## 12

The wise man who, by means of concentration on the Self, realizes that ancient, effulgent One, who is hard to be seen, unmanifest, hidden, and who dwells in the buddhi and rests in the body—he, indeed, leaves joy and sorrow far behind.

**WISE MAN:** Dhira, the Sanskrit word in the text, denotes a man endowed with inner calmness acquired through discrimination between the Real and the unreal and renunciation of the unreal.

**CONCENTRATION ETC:** This is possible only when the mind has been withdrawn from sense-objects.

**HIDDEN:** The Self is hidden behind various forms of phenomenal knowledge caused by contact of the mind with material objects.

**BUDDHI:** The determinative faculty of the mind, free from doubt and vacillation, in which Ātman is clearly reflected.



**BODY:** Ātman, all-pervading Pure Consciousness, dwells in the physical body, which is subject to such limitations as disease, old age, and death. This accounts for Its inscrutability.

**LEAVES JOY ETC:** That is to say, the pupil realizes Pure Ātman, which transcends such pairs of opposites of the relative world as pain and pleasure, life and death, good and evil. Worldly joy is the result of contact of the senses with agreeable objects, and sorrow is its opposite.

*Furthermore:*

### 13

The mortal who has heard this and comprehended it well, who has separated that Ātman, the very soul of dharma, from all physical objects and has realized the subtle essence, rejoices because he has obtained that which is the cause of rejoicing. The Abode of Brahman, I believe, is open for Nachiketā.

**MORTAL:** Only man, among mortal beings, is capable of attaining Immortality here on earth by cultivating Self-Knowledge. Subhuman beings and the gods, who only reap the results of their past karma, do not perform any new actions leading to the realization of Immortality.

**HAS HEARD:** From a qualified teacher.

**THIS:** Self-Knowledge.

**SOUL OF DHARMA:** The word dharma denotes the inner foundation of all beings, without which they can neither exist nor further evolve. The phrase in the text is used as an epithet of Ātman, which is the ultimate basis of all.

**PHYSICAL OBJECTS:** Such as the body, the mind, the senses, and the ego. Meditation on Ātman is not possible without discrimination.

**ABODE ETC:** The King of Death is convinced that Nachiketā is worthy of Self-Knowledge and Liberation.

*If he was worthy, Nachiketā said, then Yama should forthwith instruct him about the Knowledge of the Self.*

### 14

**Nachiketā said:** That which you see as other than righteousness and unrighteousness, other than all this cause and effect, other than what has been and what is to be—tell me That.

**RIGHTEOUSNESS ETC:** The word dharma in the text denotes here the

religious rites prescribed by the scriptures, together with their fruits and their requisites. Unrighteousness is its opposite.

**ALL THIS ETC:** That is to say, the relative universe, which is held together by the law of cause and effect.

**WHAT HAS BEEN ETC:** That is to say, in the past and the future. The present is also implied. Ātman is not limited by time.

Ātman is beyond all relative experiences, which are limited by time, space, and the law of cause and effect. It is not realized as the result of performing any of the rites laid down in the scriptures.

*Yama described Brahman, or Ātman, by the symbol Om.*

## 15

**Yama said:** The goal which all the Vedas declare, which all austerities aim at, and which men desire when they lead the life of continence, I will tell you briefly: it is Om.

**VEDAS:** The word here means the Upanishads, which contain the essence of the Vedic wisdom.

**AIM AT:** The purpose of austerities is the realization of Brahman.

**LIFE OF CONTINENCE:** The reference is to the religious students known as brahmachāris, who live with their teacher, observing the vows of continence and celibacy and practising other spiritual disciplines.

**OM:** Pronounced ōm, as in home. Om is the most sacred word of the Vedas and may be compared to the Word referred to by St. John in the opening of the Fourth Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." According to Hindu philosophy, the whole of this universe has name and form (nāmarūpa) as the conditions of its manifestation. The form is its outer crust, of which the name or idea is the inner essence or kernel. The name is inseparable from a word or sound. The universe perceived by the five senses is the form, behind which stands the eternal, inexpressible Sphota, the Word or Logos. This eternal Sphota, the essential, beginningless material of all ideas or names, is the power through which the Lord creates the universe; nay, the Lord first becomes conditioned as the Sphota by His own māyā and then evolves Himself as the more concrete sense-perceived universe. The symbol of the Sphota is Om, also written Aum. Since a word is inseparable from its idea, Om and the eternal Sphota are inseparable. Therefore the eternal Om is the mother or source of all names and forms, and hence is the holiest of all holy words. There may be other words to denote the eternal and inexpressible Sphota; but the Hindus contend that Om is a

unique word and uniquely apposite. The Sphota is the material or foundation of all sounds or words, which are inseparable from names or ideas; yet it is not any definite, fully formed word. That is to say, if all the peculiarities that distinguish one word from another be removed, then what remains will be the Sphota, or Om. Therefore Om is called the Nāda-Brahman, the Sound-Brahman. The three letters *A*, *U*, and *M*, pronounced in combination as Om, are the generalized symbol of all possible sounds. *A* is the root sound, the key, pronounced without the tongue's touching any part of the palate. It is the least differentiated of all sounds. Again, all articulate sounds are produced in the space between the root of the tongue and the lips: the throat sound is *A*, and *M* is the last sound. *U* represents the rolling forward of the impulse that begins at the root of the tongue and ends at the lips. If properly pronounced, Om will represent the whole gamut of sound-production; and no other word can do this. Therefore Om is the fittest symbol of the Sphota, the Logos, the Word "which was at the beginning." As the Sphota, being the finer aspect of the manifested universe, is nearer to the Lord and is, indeed, the first manifestation of His divine wisdom, Om is the true symbol of God.<sup>1</sup> It is the symbol both of the Personal God (in His aspect of Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer) and of Impersonal Reality. *A*, *U*, and *M* represent, respectively, creation, preservation, and destruction. As has been said above, all articulate sounds lie between *A* and *M*. The undifferentiated, gong-like sound that comes at the end of the utterance of Om, when the *M* sound is prolonged, is the symbol of Impersonal and Transcendental Reality. Om is eternally existent. It was not invented by any man, but was revealed to pure-souled mystics when, in meditation, their minds communed with the Highest. (See also p. 75.)

The Upanishads speak of Om as the most efficacious symbol of Brahman. All seekers of Truth—meditating on Brahman with or without attributes—can use this symbol.

*The results of the meditation on Om are the attainment either of Brahmaloṅka or of supreme Liberation, depending upon the intention of the seeker.*

## 16

This syllable Om is indeed Brahman. This syllable is the Highest. Whosoever knows this syllable obtains all that he desires.

<sup>1</sup> This interpretation of Om is taken from *Bhakti-Yoga*, by Swami Vivekananda.

**BRAHMAN:** Here the word means Saguna Brahman, or Brahman associated with creation, preservation, and destruction.

**THE HIGHEST:** That is to say, the attributeless Absolute, or Pure Consciousness.

The worshipper of Saguna Brahman goes, after death, to Brahmaloka. But he who has realized the Absolute merges in It at the time of death; he is no longer subject to the illusion of birth and death.

*Furthermore:*

### 17

This is the best support; this is the highest support. Whosoever knows this support is adored in the world of Brahmā.

**BEST SUPPORT:** That is to say, Om is the best of all the means by which one can attain Pure Consciousness.

**HIGHEST SUPPORT:** Because Om leads to the realization both of Brahman with attributes and of Pure Consciousness.

Om is the best means for the attainment of Brahmaloka and also for the realization of one's identity with Pure Consciousness. The worshipper of Om communes with Brahman alone, either in Its relative or in Its absolute aspect. He who has realized the true significance of Om is worshipped like Brahmā Himself.

*After describing to Nachiketā the symbol Om, Yama proceeded to explain the real nature of Ātman, which is identical with Brahman:*

### 18

The knowing Self is not born; It does not die. It has not sprung from anything; nothing has sprung from It. Birthless, eternal, everlasting, and ancient, It is not killed when the body is killed.

**KNOWING SELF:** That is to say, the knower of Ātman. The knower realizes himself to be Ātman, which is Pure Consciousness. Because It is self-existent, any change—such as birth or death—is denied with regard to the knower of the Self.

**NOT BORN ETC:** A thing that is born cannot be eternal, because prior to its birth it had no existence. Such an object undergoes six changes: birth, existence (relative), growth, maturity, decline, and death. All material

objects undergo these changes. Ātman, or Pure Consciousness, is free from birth and death and therefore from the other changes as well.

ANCIENT: Old and yet new, being changeless. Ātman is uncreated; therefore It is inconceivably old. At the same time It is ever new, though not in the ordinary sense. When different objects are joined in a particular manner, a new thing is said to be fashioned: a new piece of furniture, for instance, when pieces of wood are put together in a certain way. Ātman, however, is uncompounded; It is one and without a second, the only reality. No objects existed prior to It by whose combination It could have been produced. Therefore It is uncreated, ancient, pristine, and ever new.

Through Self-Knowledge one attains Immortality here on earth. Ātman, the true Self of man, is distinct from the body, the senses, and the mind and is immortal. Yama here answered the doubt of agnostics regarding the existence of Ātman after death.

*Only those who identify Ātman with the body speak of killing It or being killed by It.*

## 19

If the killer thinks he kills and if the killed man thinks he is killed, neither of these apprehends aright. The Self kills not, nor is It killed.

APPREHENDS ARIGHT: That is to say, knows his true Self. In both instances Ātman is identified with the body through ignorance.

The agent of killing is the ego (I-consciousness), and the object is the body. The ego identified with the mind, the senses, and the body—known as the phenomenal being—kills another body. The real Self, Pure Consciousness, is the detached witness. As Ātman does not kill, neither does It participate in any other action. The life of the world, characterized by virtue and vice, good and evil, and the rest, is regarded as real only by the person who identifies himself with the body, and not by the knower of the Self.

*The nature of Ātman:*

## 20

Ātman, smaller than the small, greater than the great, is hidden in the hearts of all living creatures. A man who is free from desires beholds the majesty of the Self through tranquillity of the senses and the mind and becomes free from grief.

**SMALLER ETC:** Ātman is smaller than a barley grain and greater than the wide universe. It is the inmost essence of all things that exist, great or small. It gives all tangible things the appearance of reality. Without It nothing would exist. Ātman is one and non-dual. It appears to be many because of Its association, through māyā, with various forms. In Its true nature, Ātman is free from all attributes.

**LIVING CREATURES:** From Brahmā to the blade of grass; all embodied beings. The infinite Ātman is the essence of all.

**WHO IS FREE ETC:** That is to say, who has renounced all desires for enjoyment of objects on earth or in heaven.

**MAJESTY:** The unique greatness of the Self consists in the fact that It undergoes neither expansion nor contraction by Its association with upādhis, great or small. It does not become holy through good action or sinful through evil action, because Its association with the upādhis is illusory and not real. It always remains unchanging Pure Consciousness. But evil action creates a barrier and hinders a man from beholding the vision of the effulgent Self, whereas good action destroys the barrier.

**TRANQUILLITY ETC:** One feels tranquillity when the sense-organs are restrained from external objects and the mind is desireless. Through this serene mind one gains a vision of the Self.

Commentators who uphold Dualism explain the compound word *dhātu-prasādāt* ("tranquillity of the senses and the mind") in the text as "by the grace (*prasādāt*) of the Creator (*dhātu*)."<sup>1</sup> It is true that one does not feel the grace of God without desirelessness, inner calmness, and purity.

*Ātman cannot be known by an unilluminated person full of worldly desires.*

## 21

Though sitting still, It travels far; though lying down, It goes everywhere. Who but myself can know that luminous Ātman who rejoices and rejoices not?

**THOUGH SITTING ETC:** As Pure Consciousness, Ātman is immutable and ever stationary. Yet in the dream and waking states It appears to move. During those states It seems to be broken into various states of consciousness on account of Its identification, through māyā, with the changing conditions of the mind. Thus it is said that Ātman moves, though in reality only the mind moves.

**THOUGH LYING ETC:** The reference is to the state of dreamless sleep, when the mind lies still. At that time all particular forms of consciousness

subside and a non-differentiated awareness persists. Not being associated with any particular object of experience, Ātman seems to be everywhere. In dreamless sleep Ātman remains associated with the upādhi of the non-active mind.

MYSELF: The true nature of Ātman can be known only by a seer endowed with the subtle power of discrimination.

REJOICES ETC: When identified with the upādhis of the body and the mind, Ātman appears to be endowed with contradictory attributes, such as joy and sorrow, oneness and multiplicity, permanence and impermanence. But in reality It is free from all attributes. They are superimposed upon It through māyā.

Ātman is often compared to a mythical precious stone called the chin-tāmani, or thought-reflecting gem, which shows various colours according to the fancies of the perceiver. Like it, Ātman appears to be endowed with many attributes according to the different fancies of man. Therefore It is incomprehensible.

*Through Self-Knowledge a man goes beyond grief.*

22

The wise man, having realized Ātman as dwelling within impermanent bodies but Itself bodiless, vast, and all-pervading, does not grieve.

HAVING REALIZED ETC: That is to say, having realized Ātman as one with the Supreme Self, or Brahman.

The infinite Ātman dwells in all bodies—great and small, high and low. The difference observed between one creature and another is the result of the difference in the degree of Its manifestation. Naturally there is a greater manifestation of Ātman in a body and mind made pure through spiritual discipline than in those that are gross because of attachment to the world. The fullest manifestation of Ātman in a body and mind rendered absolutely pure by means of meditation and self-control is the goal of the spiritual life.

*Though difficult to comprehend, Ātman can be realized by proper means.*

23

This Ātman cannot be attained by the study of the Vedas, or by intelligence, or by much hearing of sacred books. It is attained by him alone whom It chooses. To such a one Ātman reveals Its own form.

**INTELLIGENCE:** The mental power by which a man understands and retains the import of the books he has studied.

**IT CHOOSES:** According to Dualistic interpreters, the words mean: "whom the Supreme Lord chooses." Obviously this emphasizes the divine grace. But according to the Non-dualist Śāṅkara, it is the self, that is to say, the lower, phenomenal self, that seeks and worships the Supreme Self, or Brahman. There is, however, no real contradiction between the two interpretations. Both self-effort and divine grace are necessary for the realization of Ātman. Through self-effort the seeker removes obstacles and prepares the ground; next there is the spontaneous revelation of Ātman. Self-effort is compared to the wind that removes the cloud. When the cloud is removed, the resplendent sun, of itself, reveals its own glory.

The Upanishad here makes a very bold statement. An aspirant cannot realize the Self by mere study of the scriptures. The grace of the Supreme Lord, who dwells in the heart as the Self, or Ātman, is necessary. It is this Lord alone whom he seeks to realize as one with himself through study, discrimination, and meditation. Being gratified with his devotion, the Lord manifests to the seeker His Spirit-Form. In other words, Ātman, which is the seeker's own Self, reveals Its real nature to him, being pleased with his earnestness and devotion. As long as a man remains egotistic and desires to know Ātman through such external means as scriptural knowledge or erudition, he fails in his quest. When all external disciplines are proved inadequate, the earnest seeker then realizes the futility of the ego and develops self-surrender, which makes possible the descent of the divine grace, resulting in his realization of the Truth. But self-effort is not useless; without it the seeker would not recognize the Truth when It revealed Itself to him.

### *Obstacles to Self-realization:*

#### 24

He who has not first turned away from wickedness, who is not tranquil and subdued, and whose mind is not at peace, cannot attain Ātman. It is realized only through the Knowledge of Reality.

**SUBDUED:** One develops the power of concentration by subduing the senses.

**NOT AT PEACE:** A man may be capable of concentration yet distracted by desire for the fruit of his spiritual discipline. At the final stage the seeker renounces all desires for fruit, including the desire for Knowledge



and Liberation. He remains absorbed in communion with Ātman. All desires, however lofty or spiritual, disturb the serenity of the mind.

The meaning is that he alone who has refrained from evil conduct and has controlled the desires of the senses, who has gathered his mind from the outside world and does not disturb it any longer by seeking even the fruit of his meditation, attains Self-Knowledge with the help of a qualified teacher.

*How can one devoid of spiritual discipline ever expect to know the true glories of Ātman?*

25

Who, then, knows where He is—He to whom brāhmins and kshatriyas are mere food, and death itself a condiment?

WHO, THEN, ETC: An ordinary man cannot, with his worldly mind, know the true nature of Ātman.

BRĀHMINS AND KSHATTRIYAS: They constitute the two upper castes of Indo-Āryan society. The brāhmin is the teacher of the spiritual culture, and the kshatriya, or military man, its protector.

DEATH: The all-destroyer.

Such is the glory of Ātman that the all-powerful brāhmins and kshatriyas and death itself are only Its articles of food. In Ātman everything disappears; by It even death is swallowed up.

*Here ends Chapter Two  
of Part One of the  
Katha Upanishad.*

## CHAPTER III

TWO THERE ARE who dwell within the body, in the buddhi, the supreme ākāśa of the heart, enjoying the sure rewards of their own actions. The knowers of Brahman describe them as light and shade, as do those householders who have offered oblations in the Five Fires and also those who have thrice performed the Nachiketā sacrifice.

Two: The jivātmā, or individual soul, and the Paramātmā, or Supreme Self.

DWELL WITHIN ETC: Vedāntic mystics make the buddhi, or intellect, associated with the heart, the dwelling-place of both the individual soul and the Supreme Self. Inside the heart there is a space described by them as the Brahmapuram, the Abode of Brahman. One of the methods of meditation is to contemplate Brahman in the heart. During the first stage the aspirant contemplates Brahman as the luminous space inside the heart, which is shaped like a lotus bud. Next he contemplates Brahman as reflected in the buddhi, or intellect. At last he realizes his own inmost consciousness as one with Cosmic Consciousness.

SUPREME ĀKĀŚA: Vedāntic mystics speak of the ākāśa inside the heart as a luminous space infinitely more pure than the outer ākāśa.

ENJOYING: Though both the individual soul and the Supreme Self are described in the text as enjoying the fruits of action, in reality it is the individual soul that does so. Unillumined people, however, think that the Supreme Self enjoys the fruits. The two live as inseparable companions. The statement in the text should be taken in a figurative sense. The Supreme Self is the detached Witness of the activities of the individual soul.

SURE REWARDS: An action is inevitably followed by its fruit.

LIGHT AND SHADE: The two souls are endowed with totally different attributes. The one is entangled in the world and the other is free.

FIVE FIRES: Every householder belonging to the three upper castes was required, in Vedic times, to offer daily oblations in the five kinds of sacrificial fire. Or the words may refer to the Five Fires described in the *Chhândogya Upanishad* (V. 4-8). (See p. 99.)

In the previous section, Knowledge and ignorance have been described in a general way as leading to contrary results. In this section, each of them will be specifically described, together with its results.

*The knowledge of both Saguna Brahman and the Supreme Brahman should be cultivated.*

## 2

We know how to perform the Nachiketā sacrifice, which is the bridge for sacrificers; and we know also that supreme, imperishable Brahman, which is sought by those who wish to cross over to the shore where there is no fear.

BRIDGE: The performer of the Nachiketā sacrifice, as a reward, transcends the suffering of mortal life on earth and enjoys intense happiness in Brahmaloka.

NO FEAR: Brahman is non-dual and therefore free from fear. Wherever there is duality there is fear.

There are two aspects of Brahman: Nirguna, or the attributeless Absolute, and Saguna, or Brahman endowed with attributes. The latter is also called Kārya Brahman, or Brahman manifested as the universe. Though it is unreal from the point of view of the attributeless Absolute, yet it is real for those who are subjected to māyā. Saguna Brahman is immanent in the universe and at the same time is its epitome. Those who worship Saguna Brahman go, after death, to Brahmaloka and become omniscient, like Saguna Brahman. The Upanishads admit the empirical reality of the universe and exhort men to cultivate knowledge of it through the realization of Saguna Brahman. The *Mundaka Upanishad* teaches that both the lower knowledge (i.e. the knowledge of the manifested Brahman) and the Higher Knowledge (i.e. the Knowledge of the attributeless Absolute) should be cultivated. Both are necessary for the stability of human society. The knowledge that is confined to the physical universe is incomplete and inadequate. Again, the Knowledge of the Absolute is not possible without the knowledge of the relative. Both are necessary for the understanding of the all-inclusive Truth. On the foundation of a true knowledge of the universe an enduring superstructure of spirituality can be erected.

*The embodied soul, identified with the world through ignorance, can either perform action for the fulfilment of desires or cultivate Knowledge for the attainment of Freedom. If it follows the first course, it*

*travels up and down in samsāra, the ever changing universe of names and forms characterized by the pairs of opposites. But if it cultivates Knowledge, it becomes free. Both these courses are described by the illustration of a chariot.*

## 3

Know the ātman to be the master of the chariot; the body, the chariot; the buddhi, the charioteer; and the mind, the reins.

**THE ĀTMAN:** Here the word does not mean Pure Consciousness, which is not related to the body or any material object. It signifies the jiva, or living being, which, though identical with Pure Consciousness, appears, through māyā, as the embodied soul, subject to birth and death, hunger and thirst, and the rest. Unlike Pure Consciousness, the jiva is the experiencer of the results of action.

**THE BODY ETC:** The body is compared to a chariot because it is moved here and there by the sense-organs, which are compared to horses.

**THE BUDDHI ETC:** The word buddhi denotes the discriminative faculty. The Hindu psychologists divided the sense-organs into two groups: the outer and the inner. The former consists of the organs of action and the organs of perception. The organs of action are the hands, the feet, the tongue, and the organs of procreation and evacuation. The organs of perception are the eyes, the ears, the nose, the skin, and the tongue. The inner organ is known by four names according to its different functions: the manas, or mind, characterized by doubt and volition; the buddhi, or intellect, endowed with the power of discrimination and determination; the chitta, or mind-stuff, which is the storehouse of past impressions; and the aham, or ego, characterized by I-consciousness. A man is mainly dependent for his action upon the buddhi, which determines what he should be doing and what he should refrain from.

**THE MIND ETC:** Through the mind the buddhi directs the senses to their respective objects, as the charioteer guides the horses along the right path by means of reins.

## 4

The senses, they say, are the horses; the objects, the roads. The wise call the ātman—united with the body, the senses, and the mind—the enjoyer.

**THE SENSES, ETC:** The five organs of perception and the five organs of action are compared to horses because they draw the body hither and thither.

**THE OBJECTS, ETC:** The different objects—including form, touch, smell, taste, and sound—are the roads pursued by the senses.

**THE ĀTMAN ETC:** The word ātman here means the individual soul. The Supreme Self, or Pure Consciousness, cannot be the enjoyer of any relative experience. Under the influence of māyā, the Supreme Self appears as the individual soul endowed with mind, buddhi, and other organs. It is the latter that experiences the various objects in the relative universe. By means of the spiritual disciplines presently to be described, the individual soul gives up these false superimpositions and realizes its true nature. The jiva and Brahman cannot, in reality, be two different entities; for in that case the jiva could never become Brahman. It is impossible for an entity to discard its own nature altogether and become something completely different. If agency, action, and the enjoyment of results are essential characteristics of the soul, it then can never be Brahman, which is utterly free from them. Like a mirage in the desert, jivahood is falsely superimposed upon Brahman.

*The harmful result of a non-discriminating intellect and an uncontrolled mind:*

## 5

If the buddhi, being related to a mind that is always distracted, loses its discrimination, then the senses become uncontrolled, like the vicious horses of a charioteer.

**A MIND ETC:** A distracted mind is like reins not firmly held by the charioteer.

**'LOSES ETC:** That is to say, cannot determine what is good and what is evil, like an unskilled charioteer who does not know what path is to be followed and what path is to be avoided.

**SENSES:** The natural tendency of a horse is to run wild; but it can be trained and brought under the charioteer's control through reins firmly held in his hands. The senses, too, are naturally impetuous; but they can be trained and controlled by the discriminating buddhi through a one-pointed mind.

*The good result of a discriminating intellect and a well controlled mind:*

## 6

But if the buddhi, being related to a mind that is always restrained, possesses discrimination, then the senses come under control, like the good horses of a charioteer.

A spiritual aspirant who, through control of the mind, is capable of distinguishing between good and evil can use his sense-organs to his advantage and ultimately realize the goal. For him the sense-organs do not offer any obstacle.

*The evil that follows from lack of self-control:*

7

If the buddhi, being related to a distracted mind, loses its discrimination and therefore always remains impure, then the embodied soul never attains the goal, but enters into the round of births.

IMPURE: A man lacking discrimination and inner serenity comes under the sway of his senses. When the senses remain unrestrained, a man commits sin, which in its turn pollutes the mind.

ROUND OF BIRTHS: That is to say, the life of samsāra.

*The good result of self-control:*

8

But if the buddhi, being related to a mind that is restrained, possesses discrimination and therefore always remains pure, then the embodied soul attains that goal from which he is not born again.

He who has realized Brahman is not born again in the world of ignorance. Having realized the illusoriness of time, space, and causality, he does not come again under their sway. But this does not, by any means, indicate that such a person ceases to exist. On the contrary, he becomes one with Brahman, Absolute Existence. All that can be said of him is that he is free from ignorance and delusion. He is awakened from the dream of illusory individuality.

*What is the goal?*

9

A man who has discrimination for his charioteer, and holds the reins of the mind firmly, reaches the end of the road; and that is the supreme position of Vishnu.

REACHES ETC: The goal of human birth is won by him who has con-

trolled his mind and discriminated between the Self and the non-Self, and who contemplates Ātman. Pure in heart and freed from all obstacles, he obtains an uninterrupted vision of Brahman; he is not deluded by the life of ignorance in the world of names and forms.

VISHNU: That is to say, Brahman, which is the all-pervading Consciousness. He is also called Vāsudeva, because all created beings dwell in that self-luminous Reality.

Verses three to nine describe the meaning of self-control and the means of its attainment. A struggling aspirant is endowed with body, discriminative faculty, mind, and senses. He is surrounded by various objects. Identified with the body and the mind, he cherishes desires, engages in many actions, and experiences their results. Thus again and again he assumes a body in the relative world. But in the course of time he seeks freedom from birth and death and the suffering of life. He then practises spiritual disciplines, of which the most important is self-control. But this control does not signify mortification of the body, the senses, or any other faculty. All these are necessary if a man is to attain his goal; but they must be properly trained and controlled. This is graphically described by the illustration of the chariot, which can take its rider to his destination only when it is well built, when the driver knows his way, and when the reins are strong, the horses firmly held, and the roads well chosen. The aspirant for Freedom should possess a healthy body and vigorous organs, unflinching discrimination, and an undistracted mind. His discrimination should guide his senses to experience only those objects which are helpful for Self-Knowledge. If, on the contrary, his body or mind or any other faculty is injured or suppressed, he cannot attain the goal, as the rider cannot reach his destination if the chariot and the other accessories mentioned above are not in fit condition. The *Katha Upanishad* here emphasizes discrimination and inner calmness as the two most important elements in the practice of self-control.

*Does the goal described in the preceding verse lie in some external, far-off region that can be reached by following a certain path? According to Vedānta, the goal lies within man himself. It is neither in heaven nor anywhere else in space. It is man's inmost Self, which remains hidden because of his ignorance. As soon as the ignorance is dispelled he knows this Self. In the following verses the Self is pointed out as a very subtle essence, and this is done by distinguishing It from the senses, the mind, and all other material things.*

Beyond the senses are the objects; beyond the objects is the mind; beyond the mind, the intellect; beyond the intellect, the Great Ātman; beyond the Great Ātman, the Unmanifest; beyond the Unmanifest, the Purusha. Beyond the Purusha there is nothing: this is the end, the Supreme Goal.

[A rudimentary knowledge of the Vedāntic cosmology and psychology is necessary for understanding the text. The first manifestation of Pure Brahman, due to Its association with ajnāna, is called the Unmanifest. This latter may be compared to a seed just before the coming forth of the sprout. The first entity to emerge from the Unmanifest is Hiranyagarbha, also known by such other epithets as Brahmā (the World Soul, or the Cosmic Mind) and Prāna (the Cosmic Life). Again, from Brahman associated with ajnāna evolve the five elements, namely, ākāśa (space), vāyu (air), agni (fire), ap (water), and prithivi (earth). As they evolve, they remain in a subtle and uncompounded state, endowed respectively with their unique attributes, namely, sound, touch, form, taste, and smell. Sound is the attribute of ākāśa; touch, of vāyu; form, of agni; and so on. From the subtle elements evolve the subtle bodies of living beings and the gross elements. The subtle body consists of the five organs of perception, the intellect, the mind, the five organs of action, and the five prānas. The organs of perception are the ears, the skin, the eyes, the tongue, and the nose. They are produced, respectively, from the sattva particles of space, air, fire, water, and earth. (Māyā, which is the material cause, or upādāna-kāraṇa, of the universe, consists of the three gunas, namely, sattva, rajas, and tamas. These gunas are present in all the products of māyā, or nature. Therefore each of the five elements contains them.) Thus, the organ of hearing is produced from the sattva particles of ākāśa; the organ of touch, from the sattva particles of vāyu; and so on. The mind, the buddhi, the chitta, and the ahamkāra are produced from the combined sattva particles of the five subtle elements. The inner organ (antahkarana) is called the manas (mind) when it considers the pros and cons of a subject. It is called the buddhi (intellect) when it comes to a decision. The chitta (mind-stuff or memory) is that aspect of the inner organ which remembers. The ahamkāra (egoity) is characterized by I-consciousness. The five organs of action (the organ of speech, the hands, the feet, and the organs of evacuation and generation) are produced, respectively, from the rajas particles of space, air, fire, water, and earth. The five prānas (prāna, apāna, vyāna, udāna, and samāna) are produced from the combined rajas particles of the five subtle elements. Afterwards the subtle elements combine with one



another and produce the five gross elements, namely, visible space, air, fire, water, and earth. Whether gross or subtle, these five elements alone are found in nature. Nothing else can be apprehended by a man's five sense-organs. From the five gross elements evolve the gross physical universe, the gross bodies of living beings, and the food and drink by which the gross bodies are sustained. (For a detailed description of the cosmology, the reader is referred to any authoritative Vedāntic treatise, such as *Vedāntasāra* or *Panchadaśī*.) It may be stated here that the purpose of the Vedāntic cosmology is to explain the universe and its origin in such a way that it can establish the sole reality of Brahman, apart from which the universe is unimportant either from the standpoint of reality or from the standpoint of ultimate value. In the deepest spiritual experience the material universe is found to be non-existent. For Vedāntic philosophers it is far more important to realize Brahman than to analyse or understand the universe. The interpretation of the phenomenal world must not lead to a denial of Brahman. Knowledge of the world must lead to the Knowledge of Brahman; otherwise such knowledge is without significance. The real purpose of the Vedāntic cosmology is to help the student to realize Brahman, and not merely to explain the universe of names and forms.]

**BEYOND:** The word in the text is *para*, which Śāṅkarāchārya explains as subtler, greater, and more inward. Thus the objects are subtler, greater, and more inward than the senses. They are the inner stuff of the senses.

**SENSES:** The gross organs of perception and action.

**OBJECTS:** The word means here the subtle rudimentary elements. They are beyond the senses, or superior to and subtler than the senses, because the senses are produced from them. Though the five objects (elements) exist independent of the senses, yet their existence cannot be perceived without the senses. Therefore, as Śāṅkarāchārya says in his commentary, the objects create the senses so that they (the objects) may be apprehended.

**THE MIND:** The mind is superior to the objects because they are under the mind's control. It is the inner stuff of the objects. Mind is a subtle form of matter.

**INTELLECT:** The intellect, or *buddhi*, is superior to the mind because it comes to a conclusion regarding the doubts raised by the mind.

**GREAT ĀTMAN:** *Hiranyagarbha*, or the first tangible manifestation of the Absolute in the relative universe.

**UNMANIFEST:** That is to say, Brahman, or the Absolute, associated with undifferentiated *ajñāna*. The Absolute Itself is beyond causal relations. The Unmanifest is the ultimate cause of all the causes and effects perceived in the material universe. Names and forms lie in it in a potential manner. As already stated, the Unmanifest may be compared to a seed ready to

burst into a sprout. Hence it is called the seed of creation. Prakriti, mâyā, the Unmanifest, and Avyakta (the Unexpressed) are synonymous terms.

**PURUSHA:** The Spirit that fills everything or that dwells in the body. It is the Absolute, Brahman, the Supreme Goal, which is described as Pure Consciousness devoid of all attributes.

**THE END:** All objects, subtle or gross, are finally absorbed in the Absolute. The different entities described in the text in an ascending degree of subtlety ultimately merge in Brahman, the Reality underlying all things.

**SUPREME GOAL:** The realization of Brahman is the final goal of evolution. One attaining it never comes back to the world of relativity.

*To know Ātman really means to attain Ātman. That Ātman should not be confused with the senses, the mind, the intellect, and the rest, has been shown in the preceding verse. If this Ātman, or Brahman, existed outside, in space, a man might lose It again after having gained It. But, as already stated, It is man's inmost essence, which remains hidden only because of ignorance. Knowledge destroys this ignorance and reveals the Self.*

## 12

That Self hidden in all beings does not shine forth; but It is seen by subtle seers through their one-pointed and subtle intellects.

**HIDDEN:** Vedāntists give the illustration of the sun, which, though a fiery orb and many times larger than the earth, can be hidden by a patch of cloud—its effulgence, even then, remaining undimmed.

**ALL BEINGS:** The same divine Self, or Pure Consciousness, dwells in all beings. It is the body, created by ignorance, that accounts for the diversity beheld in the universe.

**DOES NOT ETC:** The Self is unknown to the impure mind. That is why an ignorant person identifies himself with the body, the senses, and other material objects.

**SUBTLE SEERS:** Those who are capable of seeing the different degrees of subtlety in the various material objects described in the two preceding verses and of distinguishing them from Ātman, which is the subtlest of all.

**ONE-POINTED:** The mind becomes one-pointed through the practice of concentration and self-control.

**SUBTLE INTELLECTS:** The intellect becomes capable of subtle spiritual perception by means of constant meditation on the identity of Brahman and Ātman.

“Every living being is in reality the Supreme Brahman. But in spite of

man's being so instructed, he does not grasp the truth that he is the Supreme Self. On the contrary, without any instruction whatever he says to himself: 'I am the son of such and such a person,' and mistakes for Ātman the aggregate of the body, the senses, and the mind, which is really non-Self and is perceived as an object by the Self, like any other object, such as a pot or a jar. Alas, how deep, unfathomable, and inscrutable is this divine māyā! 'Veiled by My māyā born of the gunas, I am not revealed to all. This deluded world knows Me not as the unborn and eternal.' (B. G. VII. 25.)" (*Śankarāchārya*.)

*The method of absorption into Brahman is the reverse of the process of manifestation.*

## 13

The wise man should merge his speech in his mind, and his mind in his intellect. He should merge his intellect in the Cosmic Mind, and the Cosmic Mind in the Tranquil Self.

**SHOULD MERGE ETC:** The reference is to the practice of yoga. The activities of the senses should be stopped and the attention directed to the mind. Then the mind should be drawn into the buddhi, or discriminative faculty. Next the aspirant should sink the buddhi into the Cosmic Mind, or Hiranyagarbha. In other words, he should make his mind as pure as the Cosmic Mind, which is free from all notions of discrete individuality. Last, the thin veil of the Cosmic Mind should be rent, and the seeker should merge in the Absolute, which is calm because of an utter absence of any distinction or difference either with regard to others or within Itself.

**SPEECH:** Stands for all the sense-organs.

**INTELLECT:** The buddhi reflects the radiance of Ātman more than does the mind, or manas.

**MERGE HIS INTELLECT ETC:** The intellect is the upādhi, or limiting adjunct, of the jiva, or individual soul: that is to say, Ātman, when conditioned by the buddhi, appears as the individual soul. In this stage of discipline the soul loses its individuality in the Cosmic Soul and becomes one with it. Hiranyagarbha is associated with the upādhi of the cosmic body and mind.

**TRANQUIL SELF:** The unchanging and inmost Self of all, which is free from attributes and is the unaltered Witness of the changes that take place in the body and the mind.

*Like a beneficent mother, the Upanishad exhorts all to cultivate Self-Knowledge, because that alone leads to Peace and Blessedness.*

## 14

Arise! Awake! Approach the great and learn. Like the sharp edge of a razor is that path, so the wise say—hard to tread and difficult to cross.

ARISE: That is to say, from the sleep of ignorance, which conjures up dreams of worldly objects and is the seed-bed of all misery.

THE GREAT: Illumined teachers.

LEARN: The knowledge of one's identity with Brahman.

THAT PATH: The path of knowledge and discrimination, which leads to Brahman.

A confused traveller in the desert sees a mirage and runs toward the water in the vain expectation of quenching his thirst. A man in darkness mistakes a rope for a snake and trembles with ill-grounded fear. But when the true nature of the desert and rope is revealed by a wise person, those who were deluded no longer suffer from false expectations and fears. They regain peace of mind. Likewise, a deluded man, who associates Ātman with name, form, and action and through ignorance regards It as the doer, the instrument, and the enjoyer of the fruits of action, subjects himself to false expectation and false fear and experiences endless miseries. But when, through the instruction of an illumined preceptor, he attains the Knowledge of the Self, he becomes free from ignorance, realizes the illusory nature of multiple objects, and enjoys peace. The path to Self-Knowledge is extremely difficult. The aspirant is asked to practise the discipline of discrimination, following the instruction of a teacher.

*The subtle nature of the goal:*

## 15

Having realized Ātman, which is soundless, intangible, formless, undecaying, and likewise tasteless, eternal, and odourless; having realized That which is without beginning and end, beyond the Great, and unchanging—one is freed from the jaws of death.

SOUNDLESS ETC: The attributes of sound, touch, form, taste, and smell are related to the senses. They are properties of matter. But Ātman, being Pure Consciousness, is totally different from matter and therefore devoid of material attributes.

**WITHOUT BEGINNING:** That which is produced from a cause has a beginning and therefore is not eternal. Ātman transcends causality and is the ultimate ground of everything. It is the all-pervading essence of everything. Hence It is beginningless.

**GREAT:** The Cosmic Mind. It, too, is subject to change.

**FREED ETC:** That is to say, he attains Immortality. The Knowledge of Ātman is Immortality: the knower becomes Ātman. Ignorance of Ātman is death; for ignorance produces desire, and desire impels one to action. A man is born again and again in the relative world to reap the fruit of his action. He goes through the round of births and deaths as long as he cherishes desires, performs actions, and longs for their results. He continues to do so as long as he remains ignorant of his true nature. But when he realizes himself to be the infinite Ātman, the embodiment of Peace and Blessedness, he then becomes free from ignorance, desire, and action and is emancipated from death.

*The Upanishad extols the Knowledge discussed in the present chapter:*

## 16

The wise man who has heard and related the eternal story of Nachiketā, told by Death, is adored in the world of Brahman.

**RELATED:** To qualified pupils.

**HEARD:** From a competent preceptor.

**ETERNAL STORY:** It is so because the Vedas are eternal. The Upanishad forms a part of the Vedas.

**ADORED ETC:** That is to say, he becomes endowed with the infinite glories of Brahman.

It is a custom of the Vedic seers to end their teachings by extolling the result in order to draw the pupils' attention to them.

## 17

And he who, practising self-control, recites the supreme secret in an assembly of brāhmins or at a śrāddha ceremony obtains thereby infinite rewards. Yea, he obtains infinite rewards.

**RECITES:** That is to say, recites the text and also explains its meaning.

**SUPREME SECRET:** The story deals with Ātman, which remains a profound secret for the unilluminated.

ŚRĀDDHA: The after-death ceremony of the Hindus, in which food and drink are offered for the gratification of departed souls. It is quite appropriate that the *Katha Upanishad*, describing the immortality and divinity of the soul, should be recited and explained on an occasion of this kind.

*Here ends Chapter Three  
of Part One of the  
Katha Upanishad.*

## PART TWO

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### CHAPTER I

**YAMA SAID:** The self-existent Supreme Lord inflicted an injury upon the sense-organs in creating them with outgoing tendencies; therefore a man perceives only outer objects with them, and not the inner Self. But a calm person, wishing for Immortality, beholds the inner Self with his eyes closed.

**THE SELF-EXISTENT ETC:** The Lord, who is one and without a second, is always independent of everything. He is not accountable to anyone for His actions.

**INFLECTED ETC:** The experience of outer objects, and not the inmost Self, by the sense-organs is a kind of injury done to them by the Lord Himself when He created them and turned them outward. The word in the text may also mean "killed." As long as the sense-organs experience outer objects, they are deprived of the Knowledge of the Lord. This may be regarded as a kind of death for them. People with worldly desires do not even seek the Knowledge of the Lord, and thus fall victims to ever recurring death.

**IMMORTALITY:** Deathlessness, or eternity, is the very nature of Ātman.

**INNER SELF:** Etymologically, the word Ātman means the Inner Spirit which pervades and absorbs all, which experiences all, and whose reality remains unbroken for ever.

**WITH HIS EYES ETC:** That is to say, by turning away the senses from outer objects. The eyes here represent all the sense-organs. It is not possible for a man to experience at the same time both the external world and the inmost Self. The discipline of self-control, by which he realizes the inmost Self, may be compared to the turning back of the downward course of a swift river.

It has been stated in the previous section that the Self, hidden in all beings, does not manifest Itself and is seen only through the one-pointed mind of an illumined seer. What is the obstacle to Self-Knowledge? If the nature and the cause of the obstacle are known, one can then try to remove it.

*The natural tendency of man to dwell on external objects, which are other than the Self, is an obstacle in the path of Self-realization. This is called avidyā, or ignorance. Another obstacle caused by ignorance of the Self is the longing to enjoy material pleasures here on earth and in heaven after death. Ignorance and desires are, then, the two chief obstacles to Self-Knowledge.*

## 2

Children pursue outer pleasures and fall into the net of widespread death; but calm souls, having known what is unshakable Immortality, do not covet any uncertain thing in this world.

**CHILDREN:** That is to say, men with undeveloped intellect, clouded vision, and a craving for material pleasures.

**NET:** Which entangles ignorant souls in its meshes of repeated births and makes them victims of sickness, old age, and death.

**WIDESPREAD DEATH:** No one identified with the body can ever escape death. It is the certain end of all creatures who live under the spell of ignorance, cherishing selfish desires and working only for the fulfilment of these desires.

**IMMORTALITY:** Uninterrupted awareness of the inmost Self, which remains unaffected by the law of karma. The Self does not expand by good action, nor does It contract by evil action. Self-Knowledge alone is secure and unchangeable Immortality. The relative immortality enjoyed by the gods comes to an end in course of time.

**DO NOT COVET:** That is to say, they do not seek immortality in the perishable universe through progeny, wealth, or life in heaven. They renounce all desire for these transitory things.

The Knowledge of the Self alone makes one immortal. An unilluminated person, even though enjoying the longest life on earth, remains a victim of death.

*How can one realize That, knowing which the wise do not covet any worldly object?*

## 3

It is through Ātman that one knows form, taste, smell, sounds, touches, and carnal pleasures. Is there anything that remains unknown to Ātman? This, verily, is That.

**ĀTMAN:** Which is Pure Consciousness and the ultimate Knower.



Is THERE ANYTHING ETC: All is known through the Knowledge of Ātman.

THIS, VERILY, ETC: That is to say, what Nachiketā asked of the King of Death as his third boon is nothing but Ātman.

According to Vedānta, Ātman, which is Pure Consciousness, is the Subject, or real Seer; all outer things—including body, senses, mind, and ego—are the object, or the seen. The object is devoid of consciousness. When a sense-organ perceives an external object, it is really Ātman that is the perceiver. Ātman uses the sense-organ as an instrument. For example, when a heated iron ball burns something, it is really the fire that burns and not the iron. The sense-organs and outer things consist of inert matter; both are objects of perception. If a sense-organ of itself could perceive an object, say, a tree, then the latter also could perceive another object.

*Since Self-Knowledge is subtle and profound, the idea of the previous verse is restated:*

## 4

It is through Ātman that one perceives all objects in sleep or in the waking state. Having realized the vast, all-pervading Ātman, the calm soul does not grieve.

A man experiences three states of consciousness in the relative world, namely, the waking state, the dream state, and deep sleep. In the waking state the senses and the mind function. In dreams the mind alone functions. Dreamless sleep is characterized by an absence of activity on the part of both the senses and the mind. Ātman is the Witness of the activities of the waking and dream states and of their absence in dreamless sleep. All relative states are subject to change. Ātman alone, being the Witness of all changes, is unchanging. A man realizing himself as the immutable Ātman becomes free from fear and grief.

*The individual soul, which is the experiencer of the results of actions and the supporter of the prāṇa and the sense-organs, in reality is unconditioned by time and is the Supreme Lord of all.*

## 5

He who knows the individual soul, the experiencer of the fruits of action, as Ātman, always near, and the Lord of the past and the future, will not conceal himself from others. This, verily, is That.

**KNOWS ETC:** That is to say, realizes the non-duality of the individual soul and Brahman.

**INDIVIDUAL SOUL:** Which is conditioned by the prāṇas, the senses, and other material adjuncts.

**EXPERIENCER ETC:** The words in the text mean, literally, "honey-enjoyer." A man seeks the fruits of action as he would seek honey.

**PAST AND FUTURE:** The present is also to be included.

**CONCEAL:** As long as a man thinks of Ātman as non-eternal and limited, he succumbs to fear and tries to conceal his thoughts and actions from others for his own protection. But if he knows Ātman to be non-dual and indestructible, he then has no reason whatsoever to be secretive. The desire for concealment is the outcome of fear, which results from the perception of duality. Ignorance creates the illusory notion of duality. Real strength is derived from the realization of the non-dual Ātman.

The *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* narrates the story of the first created being, who, finding himself alone in the vast universe, was seized with fear and sought a companion. But at once he said to himself: "There is none else besides me. Why should I fear?" Thus he rid himself of fear. Likewise, when a man shakes off the illusion of duality and realizes that the non-dual Ātman alone exists, he becomes fearless.

*The inmost Self, described as the Supreme Lord, is the Self of all beings.*

## 6

He verily knows Brahman who knows the First-born, the offspring of austerity, created prior to the waters, and dwelling, with the elements, in the cave of the heart. This, verily, is That.

**FIRST-BORN:** That is to say, Hiranyagarbha. He is the first manifestation, through māyā, of Brahman in the relative universe.

**OFFSPRING OF AUSTERITY:** Desirous of creation, the Lord (Saguna Brahman) practised austerity, which consisted of intense thinking or brooding. All creation is the result of intense thinking.

**WATERS:** That is to say, the five elements. The five elements were evolved after Hiranyagarbha.

**ELEMENTS:** The material elements constituting the body and the senses are held together by the law of cause and effect.

Desirous of creation, Brahman subjects Itself to intense thinking. The first result of this thinking is Hiranyagarbha, or the World Soul. Next are evolved the five material elements, which, in turn, produce the bodies of all

creatures—gods, men, animals, birds, trees, and so on. Then Brahman enters into these bodies as their souls. Thus individualized, He dwells in the hearts of all, surrounded by the prānas and the organs, and experiences various objects. Hiranyagarbha and the individual souls, being the offspring of Brahman, are of the same nature as Brahman, as ornaments made of gold are nothing but gold.

*Furthermore:*

7

He verily knows Brahman who knows Aditi, the soul of all deities, who was born in the form of Prāna, who was created with the elements, and who, entering into the heart, abides therein. This, verily, is That.

**ADITI:** Lit., the Eater, or Experienter; an epithet applied to Hiranyagarbha because, as the World Soul, He is the experienter of sound, taste, and all other objects of the universe.

**SOUL ETC:** That is to say, who contains within Himself all beings. The deities are mentioned here because they are superior beings in the relative universe.

**PRĀNA:** The word refers to Hiranyagarbha, who is the cosmic life.

**CREATED WITH THE ELEMENTS:** The reference is to the individual soul, which appears to be born with the material elements that constitute the physical body.

**ABIDES ETC:** As the individual soul.

This verse, like the previous one, refers to Hiranyagarbha, the first manifestation of Brahman in the relative universe. Another manifestation of Brahman is the jiva, or individual living being. Both, in essence, are identical with Brahman. He who knows Brahman in Its aspect of Hiranyagarbha and jiva knows It well indeed. Knowledge of the manifest universe and the World Soul leads to the Knowledge of the Absolute. The Upanishads, contrary to the opinion of superficial critics, insist on knowledge of the manifest universe as a prerequisite for the Knowledge of Ultimate Reality. The Indo-Āryans of Vedic times cultivated a thorough knowledge of the world. Such knowledge, in the end, creates dispassion for the world and spurs the seeker to the search for Brahman, the unchanging Reality. If a person is born with true dispassion for material objects, the Vedāntic teachers explain it by saying that he must have acquired a thorough knowledge of the manifold universe in previous incarnations. The manifest Brahman, or the universe, is in reality non-different from Pure Consciousness. It is māyā that makes the apparent difference.

*The same idea is reiterated:*

## 8

Agni, hidden in the two fire-sticks, and well guarded—like a child in the womb, by its mother—is worshipped day after day by men who are awake and by those who offer oblations in the sacrifices. This, verily, is That.

AGNI: The word refers both to the visible fire into which sacrificers offer their oblations and to Virāt, or the World Soul, whom the yogins contemplate in their hearts.

FIRE-STICKS: In Vedic sacrifices fire was produced by the rubbing of two sticks of wood, known as the lower and upper arani.

WELL GUARDED: By both the sacrificers and the yogins, like a mother who protects her unborn child by means of well regulated food and drink.

BY MEN WHO ETC: Refers to the yogins, who are always alert and watchful regarding their spiritual discipline.

BY THOSE WHO OFFER ETC: Refers to householders, who daily offer oblations in the sacrificial fire as one of their spiritual disciplines.

It is Hiranyagarbha who is variously worshipped by the yogins and the sacrificers as Agni, or Fire. One who knows Hiranyagarbha knows Brahman. In this verse, too, the Vedic seer asks the aspirants to cultivate knowledge of the universe and its controlling soul.

*The discussion of Brahman alone as the Soul and Essence of the manifested universe is concluded:*

## 9

Whence the sun rises and whither it goes to set, in whom all the devas are contained, and whom none can ever pass beyond—This, verily, is That.

WHENCE: Refers to Prāna, the World Soul, which is the seed of all the tangible objects in the universe.

DEVAS: The word refers to the deities, such as the god of fire, the god of wind, the god of heaven, and so on, and also to the various sense-organs of living beings.

ARE CONTAINED: Like the spokes of a wheel attached to the nave.

The text describes the manifestation of Brahman as Prāna in both its cosmic and its individual aspect. All the shining deities arise from Prāna,

are sustained by it, and in the end, during the state of non-manifestation, become one with it. At the time of the next creation they again emerge from Prāna. This is also true of the sense-organs and the individualized prāna. They too merge in the prāna at the time of dreamless sleep and again emerge from it in the waking state. According to Vedānta, the different forms of consciousness that control the activities of the gods are the same as those that control the activities of the sense-organs. The foregoing four verses describe the ultimate non-duality of the attributeless Brahman, the World Soul, and the individual soul. Brahman is the final cause of the other two. The cause appears as effect through māyā. There is no intrinsic difference between the cause and the effect. The whole creation is māyā. Brahman alone is real.

*Some may object to the statement that everything is Brahman; for all individual embodied beings, from the exalted Hiranyagarbha down to the blade of grass, are associated with upādhis and are subject to birth and death, whereas Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, is free from all this. Brahman and the embodied beings, they may say, are completely dissimilar in character; therefore they cannot be identical. This objection is denied:*

## 10

What is here, the same is there; and what is there, the same is here. He goes from death to death who sees any difference here.

**WHAT IS HERE:** That is to say, what appears to non-discriminating persons as a phenomenal being subject to the laws of time, space, and causation, but, from the standpoint of Truth, is nothing but pure Brahman.

**THE SAME IS THERE:** Refers to Brahman, which is absolute and immutable Consciousness, free from all relativity.

**WHAT IS THERE:** Pure Consciousness, which is the inmost Self of all.

**THE SAME IS HERE:** What appears to be a phenomenal being subject to the conditions of name and form, cause and effect.

**DEATH TO DEATH:** The unilluminated soul is subject to repeated births and deaths, which are characteristic of the relative world.

**ANY DIFFERENCE:** Such notions as "I am other than the supreme Brahman" or "The supreme Brahman is other than me." The apparent difference between the jiva, or individual being, and the Creator results from the upādhi, or limiting adjunct. The upādhi is created by māyā, or ignorance. That is to say, Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, appears through māyā to be conditioned by cosmic ignorance and then becomes known as the Creator;

and the same Brahman, when conditioned by the individual buddhi, appears as the jiva. With the destruction of ignorance, the limiting conditions are also destroyed. Then one sees Brahman alone everywhere.

HERE: That is to say, in Brahman, which has never become the many.

When a man dreams he takes the dream objects to be real. On awakening, he realizes them to be unreal but takes the waking objects to be real. On the attainment of Knowledge, the same person realizes the waking experiences to be as illusory as the dream ones. Though Vedānta makes a distinction, from the relative standpoint, between waking experience, dream experience, and illusory perceptions, yet, from the standpoint of Absolute Reality, all three experiences are equally unreal. Therefore the aspirant should discard all multiplicity and see everywhere Brahman, the all-pervading Consciousness. Thus alone can he overcome fear, which is caused by the perception of duality.

*The instrument by which ignorance is destroyed and the non-dual Brahman realized is a mind purified by the instruction of a teacher and the practice of spiritual discipline.*

## 11

By the mind alone is Brahman to be realized; then one does not see in It any multiplicity whatsoever. He goes from death to death who sees multiplicity in It. This, verily, is That.

MIND: When the mind becomes pure through practice of spiritual discipline, one realizes Brahman as a mass of homogeneous non-dual Consciousness.

THEN: The Knowledge of Brahman destroys ignorance, the cause of the perception of multiplicity.

The illumined soul sees as Brahman the manifold universe, which, to the ignorant, appears as other than Brahman.

*The nature of Brahman is hard to understand:*

## 12

The Purusha, of the size of a thumb, dwells in the body. He is the Lord of the past and the future. After knowing Him, one does not conceal oneself any more. This, verily, is That.

PURUSHA: Lit., Person. It is an epithet applied to Brahman on account of Its dwelling in the body and of Its filling the whole universe.

**THUMB:** The Vedāntic mystics conceive of the heart as a lotus bud of the size of a thumb, within which there is a luminous space where Brahman is manifest. The aspirant uses this space, in meditation, as a symbol of Brahman.

*Furthermore:*

## 13

The Purusha, of the size of a thumb, is like a flame without smoke. The Lord of the past and the future, He is the same today and tomorrow. This, verily, is That.

**FLAME ETC:** This is how Ātman should be meditated upon. It is pure light without a trace of smoke or worldliness.

**TODAY ETC:** Ātman always remains the same, unaffected by the actions of the body and the mind.

The yogins contemplate Ātman in their hearts as the Lord of the past and the future. The same everlasting and unchanging Ātman, the Upanishad says, dwells now in the hearts of all and also will dwell there in the future. The idea is that there exists none who is equal to Ātman or separate from Ātman. Nor will there be any such being in the future.

*The perception of multiplicity in the non-dual Brahman is again condemned:*

## 14

As rainwater falling on a mountain peak runs down the rocks in all directions, even so he who sees the attributes as different from Brahman verily runs after them in all directions.

**RUNS DOWN:** Is dispersed and ultimately lost.

**ATTRIBUTES:** The word dharma in the text means, literally, attribute, which, according to Advaita Vedānta, is non-different from substance. The attributes which distinguish phenomenal objects from Brahman are the result of māyā and are therefore illusory. They are really one with Brahman, which, on account of māyā, appears as the universe and created beings. Gauḍapada, the great Advaita philosopher, uses the word dharma to denote the jiva, or embodied being, which is in essence identical with Brahman. (See *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā. IV. 1.*)

**RUNS AFTER ETC:** That is to say, pursues separate material entities in the

relative world. He becomes a victim of ever recurring death and does not attain Liberation.

The perception of multiplicity, resulting from ignorance, is the cause of all suffering. As rainwater, running down the sides of a steep hill, divides itself into innumerable channels and ultimately becomes lost without serving any fruitful purpose, so also he who sees the multiplicity of embodied beings created by the upādhis, and pursues them as if they were real, becomes lost in the relative world and does not attain Liberation, which is the ultimate goal of evolution.

*The illumined person is free from the illusion of multiplicity created by the upādhis. He sees the non-dual Ātman, which is Pure Consciousness. Thus his soul becomes absorbed in that non-dual Ātman.*

### 15

As pure water poured into pure water becomes one with it, so also, O Gautama, does the Self of the sage who knows.

**SAGE:** The word muni, in the text, means a contemplative person.

**KNOWS:** The unity of Ātman and Brahman.

The Soul is by nature pure, free, illumined, and immortal. These characteristics remain the same even when, through ignorance, It identifies Itself with a material body. Through Knowledge the embodied soul rediscovers its immortal nature. Nothing new is added to the Soul, nor is anything taken away from It. A woman, through ignorance, sometimes thinks she has lost her necklace, though the ornament hangs from her neck all the while. When she discovers it she does not obtain a new necklace. In spite of the apparent multiplicity, the Soul is one and non-dual, and, as such, free from fear. "Therefore one should give up false pride and haughtiness, discard the fallacious advice of the misguided logicians who proclaim the multiplicity of Ātman, and the erroneous counsel of the heretics who teach Its non-existence, and should realize Ātman's non-duality as taught by the Vedas, which are more solicitous of our welfare than a thousand fathers and mothers." (*Śaṅkarāchārya*.)

*Here ends Chapter One  
of Part Two of the  
Katha Upanishad.*



## CHAPTER II

**THERE IS A CITY** with eleven gates belonging to the unborn Ātman of undistorted Consciousness. He who meditates on Him grieves no more; liberated [from the bonds of ignorance], he becomes free. This, verily, is That.

**CITY ETC:** That is to say, the body. The eleven gates are the eleven apertures: the two eyes, the two ears, the two nostrils, the mouth, the navel, the two lower organs, and the aperture at the top of the head through which the life-breath of a yogin goes out at the time of death.

**BELONGING TO:** Under the lordship of.

**UNBORN:** Free from such characteristics of matter as birth, growth, decay, and death.

**UNDISTORTED CONSCIOUSNESS:** As, from the position of the sun, there is no change in its light, so also, from the position of Ātman, there is no change in Its Consciousness. Such modifications as growth and decay cannot be associated with Consciousness. Were this not so, one would have to think of another unchanging Consciousness to be the witness of all these changes. Ātman, being the ultimate witness of all external and internal changes, is the Lord of the body.

**MEDITATES:** This meditation is accompanied by true Knowledge.

**GRIEVES NO MORE:** Because the meditator is free from all desires and sees Ātman in all beings. The Knowledge of Brahman makes him fearless and consequently free from grief.

**LIBERATED:** The knower of Ātman, even while living in the body, is free from the bondage of desire and action created by ignorance.

**BECOMES FREE:** After death he attains final Liberation and is not under any compulsion to assume a body in the relative world.

A city and its master are quite different from each other. A change in the former does not affect the latter. Likewise, Ātman is entirely different from the body. The growth or decay of the body does not in any way affect Ātman. Immutable and changeless, It is independent of the body. Self-Knowledge is very subtle and profound. The present chapter explains it from another approach.

*There are not different Ātmans in different bodies. The same Ātman dwells in all bodies. He is omnipresent.*

## 2

He is the sun dwelling in the bright heavens. He is the air dwelling in the interspace. He is the fire dwelling on earth. He is the guest dwelling in the house. He dwells in men, in the gods, in truth, in the sky. He is born in the water, on earth, in the sacrifice, on the mountains. He is the True and the Great.

GUEST ETC: Or the sentence may be translated: "He is the soma-juice dwelling in the sacrificial jar."

TRUTH: Or the word rita may mean sacrifice.

WATER: He is born in the water as conchs, pearl-oysters, fish, and other sea creatures.

EARTH: That is to say, as barley, corn, and other cereals.

SACRIFICE: As its various auxiliaries.

MOUNTAINS: As streams and rivers.

TRUE: Of unchanging nature.

GREAT: Because He is the cause of all.

There is only one Ātman without a second, which is the all-pervasive Self of the universe. Ātman, being non-different from Brahman, completely excludes multiplicity and difference.

*Here is evidence pointing to the existence of Ātman independent of the body:*

## 3

He it is who sends prāna upward and who leads apāna downward. All the devas worship that adorable One seated in the middle.

HE: The Self, whom Nachiketā wanted to know by his third boon.

PRĀNA: One phase of the vital energy, known as the breath, whose presence is felt in the nostrils. The four other phases are called apāna, vyāna, udāna, and samāna. Apāna helps in the ejection of unassimilated food and drink. Vyāna moves in all directions and pervades the entire body as the nerve-currents. The chief function of udāna, which operates in the throat, is to help the soul and the subtle body pass out at the time of death. Samāna helps in digestion; it also carries nutrition through the body. These five are not so many different forces, but various aspects of one and the same vital energy, known as the mukhya prāna, or chief prāna, which also some-

times is called simply the prāna. According to Vedāntic seers, this prāna is a manifestation in the individual body of the dynamic cosmic energy which manifests itself through all animate and inanimate objects and sustains them.

DEVAS: Here the word means the sense-organs.

ADORABLE: Vāmana, the word in the text, also means dwarf. The Self is often described as being of the size of a thumb.

IN THE MIDDLE: That is to say, in the heart.

The sense-organs bring the impressions of the outside world to the ātman, like subjects bringing offerings to a king. That is to say, all their activities are for the ātman's enjoyment. The ātman uses the sense-organs and the prānas to serve its purpose, as a king uses his officers; it is totally different from them.

*The individual soul uses the body as its instrument to gain experiences, which ultimately lead to its emancipation. When it abandons the body, the latter disintegrates, like a city after the king has abandoned it.*

## 4

When the soul, identified with the body and dwelling in it, is torn away from the body, is freed from it, what then remains? This, verily, is That.

WHAT ETC: At the time of death the subtle body, consisting of the five prānas, the five organs of perception, the five organs of action, the mind, and the intellect, leaves the gross body along with the soul. The gross body deteriorates and falls into ruin.

THIS, VERILY, ETC: The Ātman whom Nachiketā wanted to know is that spiritual entity in man in whose absence the body cannot live even for an instant. It is quite different from the body.

*It may be objected that the body is sustained not by Ātman but by the prāna, or vital force, in the absence of which it perishes. This objection is answered:*

## 5

No mortal ever lives by prāna, which goes up, nor by apāna, which goes down. Men live by something different, on which these two depend.

**NO MORTAL:** According to the Vedānta philosophy, any combination of insentient parts must be for the sake of a sentient being. Combination implies purpose, which points to sentiency. For instance, an object like a house, a vehicle, or a piece of furniture, which consists of parts, does not serve any purpose of its own, but that of someone else. The prāna and the sense-organs consist of inert parts; they are produced by a combination of the subtle elements in varying proportion. Therefore they are directed in their activities by someone else, whose interest they serve. This is Ātman, or the Self, the simple, non-dual, homogeneous Spirit. Prāna and apāna in the text also include the sense-organs.

The sense-organs, the prāna, the mind, the intellect, and the rest perform their respective functions to serve the need of Ātman.

*The question asked by Nachiketā was now directly answered by the King of Death:*

## 6

Well then, Gautama, I shall tell you about this profound and eternal Brahman, and also about what happens to the ātman after meeting death.

**AND ALSO ETC:** If the ātman leaves the body after the attainment of Knowledge, it obtains Liberation and is not born again in the relative world. The question as to what happens after death does not apply to the liberated soul.

*The doctrine of karma and rebirth is laid down for those who die without the Knowledge of Brahman:*

## 7

Some jivas enter the womb to be embodied as organic beings, and some go into non-organic matter—according to their work and according to their knowledge.

**ORGANIC BEINGS:** Living creatures endowed with physical organs.

**NON-ORGANIC MATTER:** Such as trees, plants, and so on.

According to the doctrine of karma and rebirth, the future of the embodied soul is determined by its present action and knowledge. By good action it becomes good, and by evil action it becomes evil. One can assume any body in the relative universe, from that of a god to that of a plant. If sattva

preponderates at the time of death, one obtains a god's body; if rajas, a human body; and if tamas, a subhuman body. But it must be remembered that the nature of Ātman is not altered by the fact of Its assuming a body. Ātman uses the body to serve Its purpose. All will ultimately attain Liberation.

*Now is described Ātman, whose nature is incomprehensible to the ordinary understanding. It is the unchanging Consciousness present in man, and the Witness of his waking, dream, and dreamless states.*

## 8

He, the Purusha, who remains awake while the sense-organs are asleep, shaping one lovely form after another, that indeed is the Pure, that is Brahman, and that alone is called the Immortal. All worlds are contained in Him, and none can pass beyond. This, verily, is That.

**SHAPING ETC:** Refers to the dream state, when the sense-organs remain inactive. When a man is asleep, Ātman, under the spell of ignorance, creates the dream objects. Or it may be explained in this way: By the very presence of Ātman, the mind, or inner organ, creates various forms out of its accumulated past impressions. In dreamless sleep, also, Ātman, or Pure Consciousness, exists as the Witness of the passive state of the mind, when nothing is comprehended. Therefore a man waking from dreamless sleep remarks that he *knew nothing* at that time. Ātman is the imperishable and unchanging Witness of the three states of consciousness.

**THAT IS BRAHMAN:** Brahman, or Ultimate Reality, is the Pure Consciousness in man, which is identical with the Pure Consciousness in the universe.

**ARE CONTAINED:** Pure Consciousness is the ultimate cause and ground of the universe.

*In spite of the multiplicity of bodies, Ātman is one and non-dual.*

## 9

As the same non-dual fire, after it has entered the world, becomes different according to whatever it burns, so also the same non-dual Ātman, dwelling in all beings, becomes different according to whatever It enters. And It exists also without.

In spite of the repeated assertions of Vedāntists regarding the non-duality of Ātman, many misguided logicians, particularly among the Dualists, insist

that there must be many ātmans. They contend that the death of one person does not imply the death of another, the fruit of action performed by one is not reaped by another, and the activity of one does not make another active. For these and similar reasons the Dualists contend that there must be many ātmans, mutually independent, each existing as a separate entity. It is because there are many ātmans, they say, that one does not see any confusion in such phenomena as birth and death. The Advaitist replies that the non-dual Ātman, because of Its association with different upādhis, or limiting adjuncts, appears to assume different names and forms. These upādhis are illusory and not real. The apparent ātmans may be many, but the real Ātman is one. Ātman pervades all the different objects in the phenomenal world and yet exists in Its intrinsic purity. Vedānta is not pantheism.

*Another illustration:*

10

As the same non-dual air, after it has entered the world, becomes different according to whatever it enters, so also the same non-dual Ātman, dwelling in all beings, becomes different according to whatever It enters. And It exists also without.

**DIFFERENT ETC:** The air, entering a physical body as the prāna, is known by different names according to its different functions. The illustration is also given of the air sounding differently as it passes through different musical instruments.

*The objection may be raised that if the Supreme Self is the Self of all things, It must then be coloured by their traits. The objection is answered:*

11

As the sun, which helps all eyes to see, is not affected by the blemishes of the eyes or of the external things revealed by it, so also the one Ātman, dwelling in all beings, is never contaminated by the misery of the world, being outside it.

**BY THE BLEMISHES ETC:** A reference to the contact of the eyes with impure things and also to the befouling of the mind which sometimes follows such contact. These do not stain the sun, without whose light no external object can be seen.

So ALSO ETC: It is the reality of Ātman that makes worldly objects appear real. Yet Ātman, because It is unattached, remains unaffected by pain and pleasure, good and evil, and the other pairs of opposites, which are falsely superimposed upon It through ignorance. The same is true of the desert and a mirage. The mirage appears to be real on account of the desert, but its traits cannot affect the desert because the two are unrelated.

The following is adapted from Śankara's commentary:

"All beings, on account of the avidyā, or ignorance, superimposed on Ātman, suffer misery arising from desires and action; but such ignorance does not in reality exist in Ātman. It is through illusion that one sees a snake, silver, water, and greyness, respectively, in a rope, mother-of-pearl, the desert, and the blue sky. The rope and the rest are not, in reality, touched even in the slightest degree by the objects falsely attributed to them, because they are totally external to the contrary notions so superimposed. Likewise, through ignorance men superimpose the wrong notion of agency, action, and the fruit—comparable to the wrong notion of the snake, silver, and so on—upon Ātman, and consequently experience misery, old age, and death. But Ātman Itself, though the Self of all, is not touched by the misery created by the superimposition of a contrary notion. Why so? Because It is, as in the case of the rope and the rest, quite external to the contrary notion superimposed by ignorance."

*It is a well-known fact that dependence is the cause of misery. The Supreme Self, which is non-dual and the Lord of all, is free from misery. Therefore the realization of the Supreme Self should be the goal of all who seek peace and the Highest Good.*

## 12

There is one Supreme Ruler, the inmost Self of all beings, who makes His one form manifold. Eternal happiness belongs to the wise, who perceive Him within themselves—not to others.

RULER: The whole universe is under the control of the Supreme Self. There is none equal to Him in power, certainly none greater.

MAKES ETC: The Lord Himself is of the nature of indivisible, pure, and homogeneous Consciousness; but on account of māyā diverse forms of sub-human, human, and superhuman beings come into existence. Thus the non-dual Lord appears as the universe containing many names and forms. And this māyā, or cosmic illusion, which has no existence outside the Lord, is His inscrutable power.

**ETERNAL HAPPINESS:** Arising out of the blissful Self and not from contact with any material object.

**WISE:** Those who are endowed with discrimination and have detached themselves from material objects perceive Ātman, following the instruction of the scriptures as explained by a qualified teacher.

**WITHIN THEMSELVES:** The Lord is manifested as consciousness in every sentient being. He is reflected in the buddhi, or intellect, like light in a mirror. Ātman, being incorporeal and all-pervading, like the sky, cannot have the body for Its support.

The Supreme Lord is the inmost Self of all, even of the most non-discriminating persons attached to the material pleasures of the outside world. Yet the latter, on account of the barrier of ignorance, cannot enjoy abiding happiness.

*Furthermore:*

### 13

There is One who is the eternal Reality among non-eternal objects, the one [truly] conscious Entity among conscious objects, and who, though non-dual, fulfils the desires of many. Eternal peace belongs to the wise, who perceive Him within themselves—not to others.

**NON-ETERNAL:** The Lord is the one unchanging ground of the entire phenomenal existence, which is superimposed upon It through avidyā. According to the Vedas, at the beginning of a new cycle the Lord creates the sun, the moon, the planets, and other material objects just as they existed in the previous cycle. At the end of the cycle they are not totally annihilated; they remain in causal form, merged in undifferentiated prakṛiti. The Lord is the unchanging substratum of the entire changing universe during its creation, preservation, and dissolution.

**AMONG CONSCIOUS ETC:** The deities and other living beings derive their intelligence and consciousness from the Supreme Self, as a piece of hot iron derives its power of burning from fire. Without the Consciousness of Ātman all beings would become inert.

**FULFILS ETC:** Brings about the fruition of man's actions according to the law of karma. The law, by itself, cannot function; it must be administered and guided by the intelligence of the Lord.

**MANY:** The embodied beings entangled in māyā.

One enjoys real and everlasting peace only through communion with the Supreme Lord.



*The bliss that arises from the realization of the Self is no doubt beyond thought and speech, which belong to relative existence; but it is directly experienced by illumined souls. Therefore one should not give up the effort for Self-realization as impossible; one should rather strive with faith and reverence.*

## 14

The sages realize that indescribable Supreme Joy as "This is That." How can I realize It? Is It self-luminous? Does It shine brightly, or not?

SAGES: Who have renounced all worldly desires.

"THIS IS THAT": That is to say, as a direct and immediate experience distinct from indirect knowledge through inference or verbal testimony. When the sense-organs stop functioning and the mind, characterized by desire and volition, becomes quiet, then alone does one attain Self-Knowledge as a direct experience.

DOES IT SHINE ETC: Can one clearly perceive the light of Ātman by one's intellect? The doubt is raised because Ātman is beyond words and thought.

*The doubt created in the foregoing verse is answered: Brahman is self-luminous; It also imparts light to other bright objects. Thus Brahman can be known both directly and indirectly.*

## 15

The sun does not shine there, nor the moon and the stars, nor these lightnings—not to speak of this fire. He shining, everything shines after Him. By His light all this is lighted.

THE SUN: Which illumines all material objects.

THERE: That is to say, in Brahman, which is the inmost Self of everything.

It is only the heat in boiling water that scalds: water, of itself, cannot scald. Likewise, the sun, the moon, and other bright objects are not themselves luminous: it is the light of Brahman that endows them with light. The self-luminosity of Brahman is known directly by the seers in the depth of their meditation; it may also be inferred from the light of the sun, the moon, and other objects. That Ātman is self-luminous may also be known

from the various manifestations of ego, such as "I feel," "I think," and "I know." The ego itself is inert and non-intelligent.

*Here ends Chapter Two  
of Part Two of the  
Katha Upanishad.*

## CHAPTER III

**THIS IS THAT** eternal *Aśvattha* Tree with its root above and branches below. That root, indeed, is called the Bright; That is Brahman, and That alone is the Immortal. In That all worlds are contained, and none can pass beyond. This, verily, is That.

**ETERNAL:** The Tree of *Samsāra*, or the relative universe, is characterized by a continuous series of births and deaths, without beginning or end. The only way to cut it down is through the knowledge and realization of *Ātman*'s identity with Brahman.

**AŚVATTHA TREE:** The well-known fig tree of India, which sends down its branches so that they strike root and form new stems, one tree growing into a sort of forest.

**ROOT ABOVE:** In an ordinary tree, the tap-root extends downward; but in the Tree of *Samsāra*, this root is high up. The root is Brahman, which is the ultimate cause of everything. According to Non-dualistic *Vedānta*, the Absolute (*Nirguna Brahman*) is beyond the category of causality. Brahman with *māyā* (*Saguna Brahman*) is the root of the universe. *Māyā*, however, has no existence independent of Brahman. Therefore *Saguna Brahman* is, in reality, the same as the Absolute.

**BRANCHES BELOW:** Heaven, earth, hell, and all other spheres of relative existence inhabited by either embodied or disembodied souls are described here as the downward-spreading branches of the Tree of the Universe. Or the branches may mean such cosmic principles as the universal mind (*mahat*), I-consciousness (*ahamkāra*), and the five subtle elements (*tanmātrās*).

**THAT ROOT:** That is to say, the root of the universe.

**BRIGHT:** Self-luminous because It is Pure Consciousness.

**BRAHMAN:** Of exceeding majesty.

**IN THAT . . . CONTAINED:** The universe of names and forms is superimposed by *māyā* on Brahman, like a mirage on the desert. As the mirage arises from the desert, rests in it, and, when the truth is known, ultimately disappears in the desert, so also the universe arises from Brahman, rests in It, and ultimately disappears in Brahman. As the mirage is perceived to be unreal when the truth regarding the desert is known, so also the universe of names and forms is perceived to be unreal when the truth regarding Brahman is known.

**NONE ETC:** The effect can never transcend the cause. A product of gold cannot transcend the gold itself. Brahman is the cause, and the universe, the effect.

**THIS ETC:** The Ātman about which Nachiketā asked the King of Death is none other than Brahman.

Śankarāchārya, in order to spur men on the path of renunciation, gives in his commentary the following vivid description of the Tree of the Universe:

"The universe is endowed with the unending and manifold miseries of birth, old age, death, and grief; it changes its nature every moment. Like magic, a mirage, or a castle in the air, the universe is perceived, only to vanish ultimately. It is non-eternal, like a tree. Again, like a plantain tree, it has no inner substance. A subject of idle fancies on the part of many stupid heretics, its real nature remains undetermined by wise seekers after Truth. The ultimate root of the universe is the Supreme Brahman ascertained by Vedānta; its seed is avidyā, desire, action, and the Unmanifest; its sprout is Hiranyagarbha, in which are combined the powers of knowledge and activity of the lower Brahman; its trunk is formed of the various subtle bodies of living beings; its haughty growth is hastened by the sprinkling of the waters of longing for enjoyment. Its tender shoots are the various objects of the organs of perception; its leaves are the Vedas, the Smritis, logic, and other forms of knowledge and instruction; its beautiful blossoms are such deeds as the multifarious sacrifices, gifts, and penances; its diverse tastes are the experience of joy and sorrow; and its endless fruits are heaven and the other planes enjoyed by living beings as the reward of their actions. Its numerous subsidiary roots are entwined together, fastened in the earth, and nourished by the waters of longing for the results of action. The nests in the tree have been built by birds, that is to say, all the living beings—from Brahmā downwards—who reside in the seven higher heavens. The Tree of the Universe is constantly reverberating with the tumultuous noise arising from dancing, singing, instrumental music, sport, arrogant uproar, laughter, jostling, lamentations, and such exclamations as 'Alas! I am done for!' and 'Leave me alone!', induced by hilarity and weeping, which are the results of the happiness and unhappiness of living beings. Shaken constantly by the high winds of desires and their fruits, this Tree can be felled only by the irresistible sword of detachment forged in the fire of knowledge of the identity of Brahman and Ātman as taught in Vedānta."

From the sight of cotton lying on the ground, a man comes to know of the existence of the cotton tree and its unseen root. Likewise, from the universe one can infer the existence of Brahman, its unseen cause. The third chapter is begun with that end in view.

*It may be contended that Brahman, the root of the universe, by the knowing of which men are said to attain Immortality, does not exist, and that all these perceived phenomena have come out of nothing. The contention is denied:*

## 2

Whatever there is—the whole universe—vibrates because it has gone forth from Brahman, which exists as its Ground. That Brahman is a great terror, like a poised thunderbolt. Those who know It become immortal.

**WHATEVER ETC:** The whole universe, otherwise inert, vibrates with life because it is a projection of Brahman, which is Life itself. It is the reality of Brahman that makes everything in the universe appear real. It is the reality of the desert that imparts the appearance of reality to a mirage. Therefore the existence of Brahman as the cause of the universe cannot be denied.

**POISED THUNDERBOLT:** The thunderbolt (vajra) is the terrible weapon of Indra with which he killed Vritra, the king of the demons.

At the sight of the master armed with a drawn sword, the servants unflinchingly obey his commands; likewise, the sun, the moon, the stars, and the planets obey the commands of Brahman without allowing themselves a moment's respite. It is the power of Brahman that controls the movements of the universe. (See pp. 61-62; *Br. Up.* III. viii. 9.)

*How does the universe function through fear of Brahman?*

## 3

From terror of Brahman, fire burns; from terror of It, the sun shines; from terror of It, Indra and Vāyu, and Death, the fifth, run.

**INDRA:** The king of the gods.

**VĀYU:** The god of wind.

**DEATH:** The god of death.

**RUN:** Perform their functions expeditiously.

That fire, the sun, the senses (Indra), the wind (Vāyu), and death perform their functions without the slightest deviation from law is the result of the stern control exercised over them by Brahman, the Supreme Lord.

*Liberation follows the Knowledge of Brahman.*

4

If a man is able to realize Brahman here, before the falling asunder of his body, then he is liberated; if not, he is embodied again in the created worlds.

According to Non-dualistic Vedānta, the Knowledge of Brahman is Liberation. The Soul is always free, illumined, and pure; māyā, or ignorance, conceals Its nature and conjures up the illusory notions of individuality, desires, actions, birth, death, rebirth, and the rest. When the ignorance is destroyed, It becomes aware of Its true nature, of what It always is. The law of cause and effect functions in the world of becoming and not in the realm of pure being. One devoid of the Knowledge of Brahman falls a victim to the ever recurring cycle of birth and death.

*The clearest vision of Brahman is possible only in this life.*

5

As in a mirror, so in the buddhi; as in a dream, so in the World of the Fathers; as in water, so Brahman is seen in the World of the Gandharvas; as in light and shade, so in the World of Brahmā.

**AS IN A MIRROR:** As one sees one's reflection clearly in a clean mirror, so one sees Brahman clearly in the buddhi.

**IN THE BUDDHI:** That is to say, in the intellect purified by self-control and contemplation, when the buddhi has become clean, like a stainless mirror. The ultimate conviction regarding the reality of Brahman is attainable only through such spiritual disciplines as discrimination, detachment, self-control, and meditation. Brahman then becomes as tangible as "a fruit lying on a man's palm." Knowledge of Brahman after death or in the various heavens is indistinct, as in a dream. Dream experiences are generally vague and confused, because they are the cumulative product of the desires and impressions of the waking state.

**THE WORLD OF THE FATHERS:** The vision of Ātman is indistinct in the World of the Fathers, since one is engrossed there in the enjoyment of the fruits of past karma. Souls go to this plane, after death, to experience the results of their actions on earth.

**AS IN WATER:** The reflection of the body is indistinct in water; its limbs and various parts are not clearly defined.

**GANDHARVAS:** A class of demigods regarded as the singers or musicians of heaven.

**LIGHT AND SHADE:** That is to say, in a very distinct manner.

**THE WORLD OF BRAHMĀ:** The highest plane in the relative universe.

In Brahmaloka, or the World of Brahmā, one may get a very clear vision of Brahman; but that world is attained only by means of special sacrifice, worship, and knowledge. The drift of the text is that one should realize Ātman here in this life.

*How is Ātman realized? And what is the good of Its realization?*

## 6

Having understood that the senses have their separate origin and that they are distinct from Ātman, and also that their rising and setting belong to them alone, a wise man grieves no more.

**SENSES:** The organs of perception and action.

**SEPARATE ORIGIN:** According to Vedānta, the five organs of perception, namely, the ears, the skin, the eyes, the tongue, and the nose, have been produced, respectively, from the sattva particles of the five elements, namely, ākāśa (space), vāyu (air), tejas (fire), ap (water), and prithivi (earth). Likewise, the five organs of action, namely, the organs of speech, the hands, the feet, and the two lower organs, have been produced, respectively, from the rājasic element of space, air, fire, water, and earth. Therefore the organs are entirely material in nature and are distinct from the Self, or Pure Consciousness. (See p. 152.)

**RIISING AND SETTING:** Activity and non-activity. The senses and the mind are active during the states of waking and dreaming, and they remain inactive during deep sleep. These changes are in no way related to Ātman, which for ever remains as their immutable witness. Pure Consciousness always remains the same; therefore the wise man never grieves.

*It has been said that Ātman is distinct from the senses and that It is the inmost Self of all, and further that It cannot be realized from outside. This idea is expressed in the following two verses:*

## 7

Beyond the senses is the mind, beyond the mind is the intellect, higher than the intellect is the Great Ātman, higher than the Great Ātman is the Unmanifest.

**GREAT ĀTMAN:** Hiranyagarbha, which is the totality of all minds.

For the explanation of the various terms in the text, see p. 153.

## 8

Beyond the Unmanifest is the Person, all-pervading and imperceptible. Having realized Him, the embodied self becomes liberated and attains Immortality.

The knower of Ātman is free from ignorance while alive, and after death attains Immortality.

*If Ātman is entirely imperceptible, then how can It be seen?*

## 9

His form is not an object of vision; no one beholds Him with the eye. One can know Him when He is revealed by the intellect free from doubt and by constant meditation. Those who know this become immortal.

**HIS FORM ETC:** Ātman is the inmost Consciousness by which are seen all the objects comprising not only the outer world but also one's own body, senses, mind, and ego. These are perceived by Ātman, which is the eternal Subject. Consciousness is non-dual and indivisible. It is unaffected by the characteristics of matter. By reasoning in this way one can infer the existence of Ātman but cannot demonstrate it.

**INTELLECT ETC:** The buddhi, or intellect, controls the modifications of the mind. Even when the aspirant withdraws his senses from their objects, the mind can dwell on them. It is the buddhi by which he can stop the distractions of the mind. In that buddhi, free from the slightest touch of doubt, is revealed Brahman, but not as an object.

**MEDITATION:** Through meditation one acquires right understanding.

**THIS:** That is to say, the oneness of Brahman and Ātman.

*It is seen that, even among those who have heard Vedānta and appear to have understood its philosophy, there are some who do not have the actual experience of the oneness of jiva and Brahman. This is the result of certain obstacles which can be removed only through the practice of yoga. This practice is now described:*

## 10

When the five instruments of knowledge stand still, together with the mind, and when the intellect does not move, that is called the Supreme State.



**STAND STILL ETC:** The five sense-organs are withdrawn from their respective objects in the outer world, and the mind is controlled. The intellect also remains unmoving.

The yogic disciplines are prescribed to acquire concentration. Mere listening to the instruction of the scriptures and reasoning about it do not remove the restlessness or the distraction of the mind.

*What is yoga? How is it practised?*

## 11

This, the firm control of the senses, is what is called yoga. One must then be vigilant; for yoga can be both beneficial and injurious.

**YOGA:** It is characterized by detachment of the mind from material enjoyments and by communion with Ātman, which is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

**THEN:** While practising control of the sense-organs.

**VIGILANT:** That is to say, one should be watchful while practising the disciplines of yoga.

**INJURIOUS:** When yogic disciplines are not properly practised, one may fall a victim to deep sleep, laziness, or other obstacles.

The last part of the text may also mean that yoga can be both acquired and lost. If inadvertent, the aspirant may lose the spiritual result which he has acquired through self-control.

*Ātman is very subtle and profound. Its existence cannot be realized through mere reasoning. All arguments in Its favour can be met by equally strong ones against It. Therefore, according to Vedānta, the most convincing proof of Ātman is direct experience and also the statement of the seers who have realized It.*

## 12

Ātman cannot be attained by speech, by the mind, or by the eye. How can It be realized in any other way than by the affirmation of him who says: "He is"?

**ANY OTHER WAY:** Referring to non-believers, who state that there exists no such thing as Ātman, the cause of the universe, that the tangible universe is without a cause, and that ultimately it ends in void.

**WHO SAY ETC:** The gist of the text is that one should respect the teachings of the seers and accept their views about Ātman as the ultimate cause of the universe.

The following is adapted from Śankara's commentary:

"The statement of the Vedāntists that the Self is realized when, through the practice of yoga, the mind and the senses cease to function is challenged by the materialists. They say that a thing exists when it is perceived by the senses and that beyond the mind one sees nothing but void. Therefore, if Ātman is beyond the senses and the mind, in reality It is non-existent. In reply, the Vedāntists say that though Brahman is devoid of attributes and imperceptible to the senses, Its existence can be inferred as the ground and ultimate cause of the universe. A tangible effect cannot disappear into a non-existent void; it only merges into something that also exists. For instance, when a pot, which is an effect of clay, is destroyed, it disappears into the clay. That into which the effect disappears must be an existent entity. The mirage ultimately disappears into the desert. A gross object disappears into a subtle one, and the latter into something which is subtler, and so on. Thus if, in order to find out the cause of an object, one proceeds from a subtle to a subtler entity, one cannot but come to the conclusion that the ultimate cause must be an existing entity. That cause may be very subtle, but it exists none the less. Though with the disappearance of an object its perceiving consciousness, or buddhi, also disappears, yet this phenomenon can take place only on the appearance of the consciousness of something else that exists. Further, no concept of existence or non-existence is possible without a perceiving consciousness. He who says that the ultimate reality is non-existent also admits the existence of a consciousness which is the witness of non-existence. If the universe had non-being for its cause, then the effect (the universe), being the product of non-being, would itself have appeared as non-being. But one perceives the universe to be existent. Even an illusion is perceived to exist because it inheres in a real object. A pot made of clay is perceived as inseparable from the clay. Therefore Ātman, the cause of the universe, must be recognized as existent or real."

*Thus one should discard the views of the heretics and accept the existence of Ātman.*

He is to be realized [first] as Existence [limited by upādhis], and [then] in His true transcendental nature. Of these two aspects, Ātman

realized as Existence leads [the kno-ver] to the realization of His true nature.

**EXISTENCE:** That is to say, as limited by the buddhi, the senses, and the rest: Brahman immanent in the universe.

**TRUE TRANSCENDENTAL NATURE:** That is to say, free from any limitations; it is described in the scriptures as unchanging, beyond the law of cause and effect, and devoid of the notions of being and non-being. What is called the effect has no existence apart from the cause.

**TWO ASPECTS:** That is to say, endowed with and free from upādhis, or limitations.

The aspirant should first realize Saguna Brahman, or Brahman with attributes. He should meditate upon Ātman as associated with the mind and its different manifestations. It is easy to conceive of Ātman as associated with the buddhi, the ego, and the rest. Gradually the aspirant becomes capable of thinking of the higher aspect of Ātman, which has been described as subject to no upādhi or condition, different from the known and higher than the unknown, and as invisible and incorporeal. Ātman is the cause of everything, including the mind and the buddhi. The effect is in reality non-different from the cause. What appear to differentiate the former from the latter, as in the case of the pot and the clay, are names and forms, which are used for the convenience of man's practical life. In reality the pot is the same as the clay. The Vedāntic mystics also state that Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, assumes a form in association with māyā. The devotee first beholds Brahman with form. Next, when he is eager to realize the Absolute, Brahman Itself removes, as it were, the veil of the upādhi and reveals to the devotee Its all-annihilating and all-embracing formless nature. Thus it is not solely the personal effort of the seeker that brings about this profound mystical experience; there is also divine grace.

*Desirelessness is the condition of Immortality.*

#### 14

When all the desires that dwell in the heart fall away, then the mortal becomes immortal and here attains Brahman.

**DESIRE:** The three main desires are related to progeny, wealth, and happiness in heaven.

**HEART:** It is the buddhi to which desires cling. Ātman is always free from desires.

**FALL AWAY:** Because for a knower of Brahman there is nothing else to be desired. Desires arise in the mind during the state of ignorance, when a man regards himself as a finite entity.

**MORTAL:** The notions of birth and death result from ignorance of man's true nature and identification with the body.

**IMMORTAL:** The infinite and omnipresent Ātman is beyond time and space and free from the law of causality. Hence birth, death, and rebirth cannot be applied to It.

**HERE:** A man can destroy all his bondage and attain Freedom while dwelling in this very body. Immortality is the realization of the timelessness of Ātman. This realization is attainable here on earth.

*It is again emphasized that desirelessness, which reveals the immortal nature of Ātman, is to be cultivated while one dwells in the body.*

## 15

When all the ties of the heart are severed here on earth, then the mortal becomes immortal. This much alone is the teaching.

**TIES:** Desires fasten the soul to the world. They are products of ignorance and create such notions as "This is my body," "This is my position," "I am happy," "I am unhappy," and the rest.

**SEVERED:** Ignorance and its effects are destroyed by the Knowledge of Brahman, which creates in man the awareness that he is Brahman, the Absolute, free from all touch of relativity. Only the Knowledge of Brahman can cut ignorance to its very root.

**ON EARTH:** Freedom is attained through Knowledge and has nothing to do with death or what follows.

**THIS MUCH ALONE ETC:** The essence and conclusion of the instruction of Vedānta.

It may be contended that a man in deep sleep or in an unconscious state also appears to have no desires. The reply is that such a man is not really free from desires; for after coming to the normal state he again becomes aware of his desires. One becomes truly desireless by realizing the infinite and eternal nature of Ātman.

*The teachings of the Upanishad are completed with the preceding verse. What follows does not refer to the knower of the highest Brahman: as a result of his realization of his identity with the all-pervading*

*Brahman, he has severed, while living in the body, all the manifold ties of ignorance. For such an illumined soul no rebirth is possible. "He attains Brahman here." "His prāna does not go anywhere else for rebirth; it merges here in the Supreme Brahman." "Always one with Brahman, he attains Brahman." The following verses refer to those who, after death, either go to Brahmaloka or return to earth from a lower heaven to continue their phenomenal existence. Their purpose is to show, by contrast, the unique good that follows the Knowledge of Brahman. Furthermore, Nachiketā had asked the King of Death about the Fire-sacrifice as his second boon, and received a suitable reply. Now the Upanishad describes how the fruit of that sacrifice is reaped.*

## 16

There are one hundred and one arteries of the heart, one of which pierces the crown of the head. Going upward by it, a man [at death] attains immortality. But when his prāna passes out by other arteries, going in different directions, then he is reborn in the world.

ONE OF WHICH: Called sushumnā by the yogins.

A MAN: Referring to the worshipper of Saguna Brahman, who at the time of death controls the ātman in the heart by the power of yoga and makes it go upward through the sushumnā artery.

IMMORTALITY: Not the absolute Immortality experienced by the knower of the Supreme Brahman, but the relative immortality enjoyed by the dwellers in Brahmaloka.

BUT WHEN ETC: Refers to those who are attached to the world and come back to earth after experiencing the results of their past actions.

Non-dualistic Vedānta speaks of various courses after death, depending upon the relative merit of one's action and knowledge while living on earth. The worshippers of Saguna Brahman go, after death, to Brahmaloka. Those who, with a view to enjoying material rewards, perform their daily duties and ritualistic worship, and also engage in humanitarian work, go to a lower heaven, from which they come back to earth and assume human bodies. Those who are devoid of spiritual consciousness and indulge in vile actions are born as subhuman beings. These too are reborn, however, in still later incarnations, as human beings, when they take up again the thread of their higher evolution. All the courses mentioned above pertain to those who fail to attain complete Self-Knowledge while living on earth. But the knower of Brahman becomes free from all notions of time, space, and causality, which are created by ignorance, and attains Immortality even in this body.

*The Upanishad is concluded:*

## 17

The Purusha, not larger than a thumb, the inner Self, always dwells in the hearts of men. Let a man separate Him from his body with steadiness, as one separates the tender stalk from a blade of grass. Let him know that Self as the Bright, as the Immortal—yea, as the Bright, as the Immortal.

SEPARATE HIM: Ātman can be separated from the body, mind, and the rest by means of such spiritual disciplines as discrimination, detachment, and self-control.

STEADINESS: Infinite patience and perseverance are necessary for the attainment of Self-Knowledge. Inadvertence and sloth are its greatest enemies.

STALK ETC: The tender shoot generally lies hidden in a blade of grass. One needs a steady hand and a well controlled mind to separate the one from the other.

YEA, ETC: The repetition shows that the Upanishad ends here.

*The teachings of the Upanishad are eulogized:*

## 18

Having received this wisdom taught by the King of Death, and the entire process of yoga, Nachiketā became free from impurities and death and attained Brahman. Thus it will be also with any other who knows, in this manner, the inmost Self.

ENTIRE ETC: That is to say, including the methods and results of yoga.

IMPURITIES: Characterized by dharma, or righteousness, and adharma, or unrighteousness, merit and demerit, and all the other pairs of opposites belonging to the relative universe.

The attainment of Self-Knowledge and the realization of Immortality are possible for all who are willing to practise the discipline.

*Here ends Chapter Three  
of Part Two of the  
Katha Upanishad.*

*Here ends the Katha Upanishad.*

## PEACE CHANT

**Om. May Brahman protect us both! May Brahman bestow upon us both the fruit of Knowledge! May we both obtain the energy to acquire Knowledge! May what we both study reveal the Truth! May we cherish no ill feeling toward each other!**

**Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!**

The peace chant is recited by both the teacher and the disciple in order to remove any blemish incurred while imparting or receiving the instruction.

# IŚA UPANISHAD



## INTRODUCTION

THE *Īśa Upanishad* forms the fortieth chapter of the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* of the Śukla Yajur-Veda. The Upanishad, containing the Vedic philosophy, generally forms the concluding section of the *Āranyaka*, which, in turn, belongs to the *Brāhmana* portion of the Vedas. The *Īśa Upanishad*, however, is an exception, forming a part of the *Samhitā*, or *Mantra*. It derives its name from the opening word of the book: *Īśāvāsyam*. A short treatise consisting of only eighteen mantras, or verses, the *Īśa Upanishad* appears to be a very ancient Upanishad, as is evidenced by its versification and literary style.

The book contains many obscure passages, which are explained differently by different commentators to suit their particular theories and systems. We are following the commentary of Śaṅkarāchārya, according to whom the path of action and the path of knowledge cannot be pursued by a person at one and the same time. The goal of the former is the attainment of happiness in the relative world, here or hereafter, and the goal of the latter, the realization of Immortality through the knowledge of the identity of Brahman and Ātman. But action, if performed following the instructions of the Vedas, ultimately prepares one for the cultivation of knowledge.

The *Īśa Upanishad* refers to both disciplines. The first verse states that the sense-perceived world is illusory. It appears to exist because Brahman, or the Absolute, pervades it both inwardly and outwardly, as gold pervades a gold ornament. The universe has no existence apart from Brahman. Brahman is identical with Ātman. Therefore the aspirant should see Ātman in all beings and renounce greed and lust, which are based upon the mistaken notion that multiplicity is real and upon ignorance of the true nature of the Self.

But the second verse declares that those who are attached to earthly life and material enjoyments should perform duties in accordance with the directions of the scriptures.

Verses three to eight are meant for sannyāsins, who have realized

the transitory nature of material pleasures and have renounced the world in order to attain the Knowledge of Ātman. Ātman is Pure Consciousness, non-dual, immutable, transcendent, and indescribable by any qualification or predicate. The knower of Ātman overcomes grief and delusion and loves all beings as his very self.

Verses nine to fourteen apply to those who cannot ascend the steep path of total renunciation. Some among them engage in the mechanical performance of sacrifices and rituals without understanding the deities behind such action; and some devote themselves to meditation on the deities without the performance of appropriate rituals.

According to the author of the *Iśa Upanishad*, the two disciplines should be harmonized. Likewise, the aspirant should harmonize devotion to the unmanifest (prakṛiti) and to the World Soul (Hiranyagarbha, or Brahṁā). Thus alone can he reap the desired result, which is the attainment of Brahmaloka, where he will enjoy a kind of relative immortality as long as the cycle lasts. Afterwards the aspirant will realize the Absolute and thus become free from all relativity.

The last four verses deal with the prayer of the aspirant on his death-bed. He prays to the sun, a vivid symbol of Brahman, to withdraw the outer physical light so that the inner effulgence of Truth may be revealed. As the hour of death approaches, he fills his mind with the memories of his good deeds; the thought at the final moment determines the course of the soul hereafter. And lastly he prays to Fire, which will soon consume his physical body, to lead his soul through the Way of the Gods to Brahmaloka, from which he will attain final Liberation.

S. N.

## SRI ŚANKARĀCHĀRYA'S INTRODUCTION

*Om. Salutations to Brahman!*

THE MANTRAS *beginning with Isāvāsyam in the Upanishad are not to be used for ritualistic action, because they reveal the true nature of Ātman, which cannot be attained as a result of any action.*<sup>1</sup> It will be presently said that Ātman, in Its real nature, is pure, sinless, non-dual, eternal, incorporeal, and omnipresent, and therefore the Knowledge of It is in conflict with work.<sup>2</sup> Therefore it is right to say that these mantras of the *Īśa Upanishad are not to be used in ritualistic action.*

Furthermore, Ātman, as described above, cannot be connected with an action, because It is not something that is attained, created, or produced through the process of purification or transformation; and also because It is not of the nature of a doer or an enjoyer.<sup>3</sup>

*The sole purpose of all the Upanishads is to determine the true*

<sup>1</sup> The *Īśa Upanishad* is a part of the Mantra section of the Vedas, which deals with sacrifices and other ritualistic action. But this Upanishad has no bearing upon rituals; it deals with the Knowledge of Ātman, or Brahman. According to Śankara, action associated with such diverse factors as the doer, the instrument, and the result cannot be harmonized with the Knowledge of Ātman, which annihilates all multiplicity.

<sup>2</sup> If a man realizes that he is the pure and all-pervading Spirit, the embodiment of Peace, Blessedness, and Knowledge, and further, if he sees perfection everywhere, he cannot engage in any action. On the other hand, if he regards himself as a finite being, subject to birth and death, pain and pleasure, and the other pairs of opposites, he undertakes work to attain what is agreeable and shun what is disagreeable.

<sup>3</sup> By means of action a previously non-existent thing, such as a jar or a pot, is created (*utpādyā*); or one thing is transformed into another (*samskāryā*), like milk into curds; or a thing which exists but which is not within reach is attained (*āpyā*); or a thing is purified (*vikāryā*) by the elimination of its defects. All these possibilities are precluded in Ātman because, as the inmost Self of all, It is eternal, unchanging, and pure.

nature of Ātman; the *Bhagavad Gītā*<sup>4</sup> and other treatises<sup>5</sup> dealing with man's Liberation have the same end in view.

Action has been prescribed in the scriptures to suit the understanding of worldly people, who associate with Ātman such characteristics as multiplicity, agency, enjoyment, impurity, sinfulness, and so on.

According to those competent to determine who should perform work and who should not, he who seeks the result of action<sup>6</sup>—a result visible on earth, such as the glories of a brāhmin's life, or a result not so visible, such as enjoyment in heaven—and who says to himself: "I am twice-born and free from such defects as blindness or a hunchback, which disqualify one for sacrificial work," is entitled to perform work.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Compare: "He who sees the Supreme Lord abiding alike in all beings and not perishing when they perish—verily he alone sees." (B. G. XIII. 27.)

<sup>5</sup> Compare: "The Self, though one and non-dual, appears to dwell in all beings, like the moon, which, though one, is seen reflected in many waves." (*Mahābhārata*.)

<sup>6</sup> The desire to seek a result is due to ignorance. Ātman is in reality detached, like the sky. Uncontaminated by sorrow, It is Supreme Bliss. Work which is undertaken to satisfy an unfulfilled desire—to obtain what is agreeable or to shun what is disagreeable—cannot, therefore, be associated with Ātman.

<sup>7</sup> An explanation is necessary regarding the relationship between action and the Knowledge of Ātman. The term "work" is generally used in the Upanishads to mean sacrificial, ritualistic, and devotional action, or such philanthropic action as the digging of a well or construction of a road, all of which are associated with the idea of a doer, an instrument, and an expected result. The Knowledge of Ātman, according to the Vedāntic seers, reveals the unity of existence and enables one to realize that the Self is always pure, free, illumined, and of the nature of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, and that It is devoid of all the desires that belong to a finite being. Therefore the Knowledge of the Self and the performance of action are incompatible.

But there is an undeniable need of action for a man's spiritual evolution. Though his nature is that of infinite Spirit, yet he is ignorant of it and acts, to all intents and purposes, like a finite creature. The goal of spiritual discipline is the attainment of Self-Knowledge. The necessity of work for a man is emphasized by Hindu philosophers as long as, on account of ignorance, he identifies himself with the body and regards himself to be a finite being. Through the performance of unselfish action his heart becomes pure and he develops a real desire to know Ātman. Then he receives instruction from a qualified teacher, reasons about Ātman, and contemplates It. At last, in the depths of meditation, he realizes himself to be Pure Spirit, free from birth and death, grief and delusion, desire and action. He attains Immortality.

But an illumined soul is by no means inert. The seers of the Upanishads and Śankara himself were not inactive. Every moment of their lives was dedicated to the welfare of the world. The words action and inaction, as used in the Upanishads, have a philosophical significance. The former is associated with the notions of I-consciousness, the instrument of action, and

*Therefore the mantras of the Iśa Upanishad reveal the true nature of Ātman and thereby destroy the natural ignorance regarding It. Further, they produce in us the knowledge of the oneness of Ātman by means of which we can uproot grief, delusion, and other characteristics of saṃsāra.*

*One who is eager to rid himself of the suffering and delusion of saṃsāra, created by ignorance, and attain Supreme Bliss is entitled to read this Upanishad. The true nature of Ātman is its subject matter. The relationship between the treatise and the subject matter is that the former establishes the latter. The purpose served by the scripture is that it enables one to attain the knowledge of the identity of Ātman and Brahman and thereby destroys grief and delusion, which are the result of ignorance.*

*We shall now briefly explain the mantras.*

---

the result; the latter is free from such notions. When an illumined person works, he clearly sees that the Soul is inactive, the action being carried on by the sense-organs, the mind, and the ego at the prompting of the three *gunas*. The *Gītā* describes the wise man as one who sees inaction in action. In his case knowledge and action are inseparable. Thus in eating, sleeping, walking, and playing he sees only the activities of the sense-organs, the Self remaining the unruffled witness. His ego has been completely burnt up in the fire kindled by the knowledge of the identity of Ātman and Brahman. Where an illumined person is seen to retain any I-consciousness, it has been totally transformed by the Knowledge of Brahman. Even while active, he never forgets the infinite nature of the Self. Absence of I-consciousness and total detachment from the result characterize the activities of a knower of the Self.

## INVOCATION

**Om. That is full; this is full. This fullness has been projected from that fullness. When this fullness merges in that fullness, all that remains is fullness.**

**Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!**

**THAT:** Pure Consciousness, or the attributeless Brahman.

**FULL:** Perfect.

**THIS:** Hiranyagarbha, the first manifestation of Pure Brahman in the relative universe characterized by a name and a form. It is the World Soul, the totality of all individual souls. The word *this* in the text also means the manifest universe, which, like Pure Consciousness, is perfect, names and forms being *māyā*.

**PROJECTED:** On account of *māyā*, or the incomprehensible power of Brahman. This projection or creation is like that of a mirage in a desert, or like that of the snake which a man sees, through illusion, in a rope. This projection does not effect any change whatsoever in Brahman, as the illusory snake does not alter the real nature of the rope, or the mirage, the real nature of the desert.

**MERGES:** That is to say when, by means of Knowledge, the universe is realized as Brahman.

**ALL THAT ETC:** It is because the Supreme Brahman is the only Reality. The idea of the phenomenal universe is falsely superimposed upon It.

## ĪSA UPANISHAD

ALL THIS—whatever exists in this changing universe—should be covered by the Lord. Protect the Self by renunciation. Lust not after any man's wealth.

ALL THIS: That is to say, the universe consisting of ever changing names and forms, held together by the law of causation.

SHOULD BE ETC: This universe, from the standpoint of Absolute Reality, is nothing but the Lord. That it is perceived as a material entity is due to ignorance. One should view the universe, through the knowledge of non-duality, as Ātman alone.

LORD: He who is the Supreme Lord and the inmost Self of all. He is Brahman and identical with Ātman.

PROTECT: That is to say, liberate the Self from the grief, delusion, and other evil traits of saṁsāra in which It has been entangled on account of ignorance. To be attached to matter amounts to killing the Self.

RENUNCIATION: The scripture prescribes the discipline of renunciation of the longing for offspring, wealth, and the heavenly worlds for him alone who devotes himself entirely to contemplation of the Self as the Lord. Such an aspirant has no further need of worldly duties. It is renunciation that leads to the Knowledge of the Self and protects Its immutability, eternity, and immortality.

LUST NOT ETC: That is to say, a sannyāsin, who has renounced all desires, should not be attached to what he has or long for the property of someone else. Or the sentence may mean that a sannyāsin should not covet wealth at all. For where is the real wealth in the transitory world that he should desire? The illumined person renounces the illusory names and forms because he regards the whole universe as Ātman alone. He does not long for what is unreal.

When the truth is known the universe is realized as Ātman, the Spirit that dwells in all hearts. The diversity of names and forms, changes, actions, and the rest are superimposed upon Ātman through ignorance. These are extraneous to It and unreal. Day and night the seeker after Truth meditates thus: The Supreme Lord alone dwells in all beings as Ātman; this universe, though ultimately unreal, appears to be real because Brahman alone is its

ground; since Brahman is my inmost Self, the universe has its root in the Self; it cannot exist independent of Ātman. The seeker of Self-Knowledge contemplates the world in this way and covers it by the unitive knowledge. Śankara gives the illustration of sandalwood. Sandalwood is fragrant by nature, but when kept in water for a long time it gives out a bad odour, which, however, is not inherent in it. Again, by rubbing, its natural fragrance is released; and this fragrance covers the foul smell, that is to say, destroys it. Likewise, constant meditation on the reality of Ātman and the illusory nature of the universe produces true Knowledge, which reveals everything as the Lord alone.

The text lays down the control of lust for wealth as a great spiritual discipline. We cannot know the true nature of the Self because our mind is contaminated by greed, attachment, anger, and carnal desires, all produced by our craving for possessions. The more one is attached to wealth, the less one knows the divinity of the Self. Engrossed day and night in the thought of his possessions, a worldly person finds very little time to think about Ātman. Therefore the Upanishad asks the seeker who wants to protect his spiritual treasure to renounce the craving for material wealth.

*The previous verse refers to the Highest Knowledge and prescribes the discipline of complete renunciation. But the vast majority of people are ignorant of the Self and incapable of cultivating Self-Knowledge. They still identify themselves with the body and crave material happiness. Lest they should indulge in unrighteous action to fulfill their desires, the Upanishad prescribes righteous action:*

## 2

If a man wishes to live a hundred years on this earth, he should live performing action. For you, who cherish such a desire and regard yourself as a man, there is no other way by which you can keep work from clinging to you.

**A HUNDRED YEARS:** According to Vedic tradition, the span of life allotted to a man is one hundred years.

**ACTION:** That is to say, the daily devotions and other duties prescribed by the scriptures.

**AS A MAN:** One who is identified with his body and conscious of his human duties and responsibilities.

**THERE IS ETC:** By the performance of righteous duties one can avoid unrighteous action. Furthermore, righteous work purifies the heart, creates



the desire for Self-Knowledge, and endows the seeker with power to practise the spiritual discipline which leads to such Knowledge.

**WORK:** It means unrighteous work.

A person attached to his human body and desirous of enjoying on earth his full span of life should devote himself to religious duties and other unselfish actions; if not, he will engage in evil action. It is clear that this verse does not apply to the illumined person, who is not attached to material things and is indifferent about the length of his life. According to Śankara the discipline of Self-Knowledge and the way of worldly enjoyment are totally incompatible. A sannyāsin, seeking Self-Knowledge, is indifferent to both life and death.

*The life unillumined by Self-Knowledge is condemned:*

### 3

Verily, those worlds of the asuras are enveloped in blind darkness; and thereto they all repair after death who are slayers of Ātman.

**WORLDS:** That is to say, the various planes which afford embodied souls opportunities to experience the results of their actions.

**ASURAS:** Lit., demons; those who delight in material enjoyments. Even those who experience in heaven the rewards of their meritorious actions may be called asuras, because they too are devoid of Self-Knowledge. The word worlds in the text refers to all relative states. Or it may mean "sunless," that is to say, non-luminous.

**BLIND DARKNESS:** Ignorance, which prevents one from acquiring the Knowledge of the Self.

**SLAYERS ETC:** Ātman, the self-luminous Spirit, dwells in all beings. But on account of ignorance a man is not aware of It. Therefore the experience of Immortality, Blessedness, Knowledge, and Peace, which accompanies Self-Knowledge, remains unknown to him. He becomes a victim of repeated births and deaths. Thus such a person, clinging to ignorance, is described as a slayer of Ātman.

Self-Knowledge, which enables one to experience Immortality and Blessedness, is within reach of all. It is through ignorance alone that a man deprives himself of this cherished goal and, as a result, finds himself going through the round of birth and death in various bodies, higher or lower, according to his actions and desires.

*It has been said that the unillumined person, the slayer of Ātman, whirls back into saṃsāra. Contrariwise, the illumined person, through*

*Self-Knowledge, attains Liberation; certainly he is not a slayer of Ātman. Now what is the nature of this Ātman, the knowledge or ignorance of which accounts for a man's emancipation or bondage? It is described in the following five verses.*

## 4

That non-dual Ātman, though never stirring, is swifter than the mind. The devas (the senses) cannot reach It, for It moves ever in front. Though standing still, It overtakes others who are running. Because of Ātman, Vāyu (the World Soul) apportions the activities of all.

**NEVER STIRRING:** Ātman never deviates from Its true nature but always remains the same. There is no other entity besides Ātman which can destroy Its immutability.

**SWIFTER ETC:** The mind is characterized by ever changing thoughts. The objection may be raised that the Vedic seer has contradicted himself by describing Ātman as both motionless and swifter than the mind. But there is no such contradiction, as the two epithets are used from two different points of view. Ātman, when free from upādhis, that is to say, in Its true nature, is certainly motionless and actionless. But movement is attributed to Ātman on account of Its association, through ignorance, with such upādhis as the mind and the senses. It is well known that the mind, though encased in a body, can travel in the twinkling of an eye, and by its mere will, to such a distant place as the farthest heaven. But behold! what does the mind find on reaching its destination? It finds the Self, or Ātman, already there. The drift of the text is that before one is conscious of any object one must be conscious of oneself. Self-Knowledge must be admitted before the knowledge of any object. Further, the mind is a material thing. It cannot know an object without the light of Ātman. Because Ātman is all-pervading and infinite, It is said to be swifter than the mind.

**DEVAS:** Lit., gods; here refers to the senses. The root *div* means to enlighten or reveal. The senses, such as the eyes and the ears, reveal objects; the gods, too, are luminous beings.

**CANNOT REACH ETC:** The senses are farther away from Ātman than the mind. They are grosser and denser than the mind. Their activities are controlled by the mind. Therefore if Ātman outstrips the mind, certainly It is beyond the ken of the senses, which cannot even get a glimpse of It.

**THOUGH STANDING ETC:** "Ātman is all-pervading Spirit, devoid of the characteristics of saṃsāra. From Its own standpoint, that is to say, when free from all limiting conditions, It is not subject to modification. But a

deluded person, through ignorance, superimposes upādhis upon It and thus speaks of Ātman as diverse and enclosed in different bodies. Then it seems that Ātman travels faster than the mind and the senses. But in reality Ātman is actionless and motionless." (*Śaṅkarāchārya.*)

**BECAUSE OF ĀTMAN:** Because Ātman is eternal Consciousness, without which no action is ever possible.

**VĀYU:** The first cosmic manifestation of the Absolute in the relative universe, also known by such epithets as the World Soul, Hiranyagarbha, and Prāna. It sustains the whole universe by apportioning to everyone his function. But the World Soul can exercise its lordship because Ātman is its inner Self. Without Ātman even the highest cosmic entity becomes powerless and ceases to exist.

**APPORTIONS ETC:** That fire burns, that the clouds give rain and the sun light, and that the other powers of nature perform their respective functions is due to Ātman. That is why there is no confusion in the universe. The meaning is that all the activities of the universe, following the law of cause and effect, are possible because the eternally conscious Ātman exists as the inmost essence and ultimate Reality of all. The word dadhāti in the text may also mean to sustain.

*Because the Knowledge of Brahman is both profound and inscrutable, the idea of the previous verse is reiterated:*

## 5

It moves and moves not; It is far and likewise near. It is inside all this and It is outside all this.

**IT MOVES ETC:** Though by nature actionless, yet Ātman appears to move in association with Its upādhis, like the reflection of the sun in moving water.

**FAR:** For the ignorant, who cannot realize Ātman even in millions of years.

**NEAR:** For the wise, who know It to be their inmost Self.

**INSIDE:** Because It is the essence of all; or because It is the omnipresent Spirit, subtle as ākāśa.

**ALL THIS:** That is to say, the universe characterized by name, form, and movement.

**OUTSIDE:** Because Ātman is all-pervading.

By associating Ātman with contradictory attributes, the Upanishad indicates that It is really Pure Consciousness, free from all attributes. (See pp. 30-31.)

*One who is endowed with Self-Knowledge loves all beings.*

## 6

The wise man beholds all beings in the Self, and the Self in all beings; for that reason he does not hate anyone.

ALL BEINGS: From the World Soul, the highest cosmic manifestation, to the blade of grass.

SELF: Other beings are not distinct from one's Self. The Spirit is one and indivisible. It is the names and forms superimposed by ignorance that create the apparent multiplicity. They are transitory and ultimately unreal.

THE SELF IN ALL BEINGS: This refers to Pure Consciousness, which is the inmost Ātman of all embodied beings. Transcendental in Itself, Ātman is the witness of all acts of perception. One sees difference only in the physical and mental planes.

DOES NOT ETC: Hatred arises when one sees evil in something which is other than oneself. But the very root of hatred is destroyed when one sees Ātman alone in oneself and others.

The perception that Pure Consciousness is the essence and reality of all is the foundation of the Golden Rule. He who is firmly established in the perfect equality of Ātman, *samatva*, has overcome all repulsion, secretiveness, shrinking, dislike, fear, hatred, and other perverse traits which arise from the perception of separation. A man endowed with Self-Knowledge remains undisturbed by the outer manifestation of ugliness or beauty, strength or weakness, saintliness or sinfulness; he feels love and compassion for all and works for the welfare of all. His sympathy goes much deeper than that of the social reformer or philanthropist.

*The knower of the Self overcomes grief and delusion.*

## 7

To the seer, all things have verily become the Self: what delusion, what sorrow, can there be for him who beholds that oneness?

WHAT DELUSION, ETC: When, on account of ignorance, a person regards himself as a finite psycho-physical entity and takes multiplicity to be real, he feels the desire to possess something in the outer world and acts to that end. He grieves when he loses what he loves or when he comes in contact with what he hates. But he who knows Ātman to be blameless and pure, and sees It as the essence of everything, cannot be overwhelmed by grief or delusion.

Both ignorance (*avidyā*) and its effect, that is to say, multiplicity, are

destroyed for the knower of Ātman. This Knowledge itself is Liberation. The knower, though living in a body, is free from attachment and aversion, pain and pleasure, and the other pairs of opposites.

*The real nature of Ātman:*

## 8

It is He who pervades all—He who is bright and bodiless, without scar or sinews, pure and by evil unpierced; who is the Seer, omniscient, transcendent and uncreated. He has duly allotted to the eternal World-Creators their respective duties.

**WHO PERVADES ETC:** Brahman interpenetrates everything and pervades the phenomenal universe as fragrance pervades sandal-paste.

**BRIGHT:** Refers to the luminosity of the pure Self.

**BODILESS:** Without a subtle form.

**WITHOUT SCAR ETC:** Without any defect. Brahman is devoid of a gross form.

**PURE:** Free from a causal body.

**BY EVIL UNPIERCED:** Uncontaminated by such limitations of prakṛiti as dharma (righteousness) and adharma (unrighteousness). As a witness, He watches the modifications of prakṛiti; He is not impressed or troubled by them.

**SEER:** He sees all in detail as well as in its totality.

**OMNISCIENT:** The ruler of the mind, which is the organ of understanding.

**TRANSCENDENT:** Beyond all manifestations.

**DULY:** That is to say, according to their past actions and spiritual evolution. The Vedas say that righteous human beings become gods after death and thus enjoy the result of their good work. They are generally placed in charge of the various cosmic functions. Brahman as Rīta, or Truth, controls all the activities of the relative world.

**ETERNAL WORLD-CREATORS:** They endure as long as the universe lasts, but are not absolutely eternal, like Brahman, which transcends time.

**WORLD-CREATORS:** Various exalted cosmic beings, such as Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva; or the word may mean the Creators of different universes. (See p. 71 ff.)

The last sentence of the text may be differently explained: He has ordered rightly all objects for all eternity.

*The unilluminated person, in striving for a superior result, should*

*combine action (rituals) with meditation on a devatā (deity). The unsatisfactory result of pursuing one method alone is pointed out:*

## 9

Into a blind darkness they enter who are devoted to ignorance (rituals); but into a greater darkness they enter who engage in knowledge [of a deity] alone.

**BLIND DARKNESS:** It is characterized by an absence of knowledge because it is opposed to knowledge.

**IGNORANCE:** The word *avidyā* in the text signifies karma, or ritualistic action, such as the Agnihotra sacrifice.

**GREATER DARKNESS:** The result of meditation on the deities without any ritual leads to a greater darkness.

**KNOWLEDGE:** The word knowledge here means knowledge or contemplation of a deity. It does not signify Supreme Knowledge.

The following interpretation of the text is adapted from Śāṅkara's commentary: "The first verse of the *Īśa Upanishad* refers to devotion to the Knowledge of Brahman through renunciation of all desires. The second verse lays down devotion to action (rituals) for those who are ignorant, desirous of a long life on earth, and incapable of cultivating devotion to Knowledge. This division into the two paths of knowledge and action has also been made in the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*. The latter prescribes performance of action for persons devoid of Self-Knowledge and attached to desires. It further points out that lack of the Higher Knowledge and longing for material enjoyments incline one to devotion to action. The result of such action is identification of the Self with various material objects, such as the body, the senses, and the mind, which entangles one in *samsāra*. On the contrary, according to the same *Upanishad*, the knower of the Self, through renunciation of wife, offspring, and so on, cultivates detachment from action and shows devotion to Knowledge. 'What shall we achieve through children—we who have attained this Self, this world?' The third verse of the *Īśa Upanishad* condemns ignorant people, and verses four to eight disclose the true nature of Ātman for those *sannyāsins* who are devoted to the Knowledge of Brahman. People who cherish desires are not qualified to cultivate that Knowledge. The *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad* states: 'The sacred Self-Knowledge, prized by the assembly of *rishis*, was taught only to those who belonged to the highest order of *sannyāsins*.' The ninth verse refers to those who are devoted to work and want to perform it as long as they live. It may be asked how one can know that this verse refers to them only and does not lay down a universal law to be applied to all. The answer is that a desireless person, as stated in verse seven, over-

comes the illusory distinction between the means and the ends of actions. This is because of his attainment of the Knowledge of Ātman, which does not admit of any distinctions. This Knowledge cannot be harmonized, by anyone except a fool, with karma or with any other kind of knowledge (that is to say, knowledge of a deity). Verse nine condemns ignorant people with a view to harmonizing work with knowledge of a deity. Work can be harmonized with such knowledge both through reason and on scriptural authority. That harmonization is suggested in this verse. The knowledge of a deity, which is to be combined with work, cannot be the Knowledge of Ātman; for the former enables one to attain Devaloka (the Plane of the Deities), whereas the latter gives one Liberation. But the knowledge of a deity can very well be harmonized with the performance of action. Such harmonization is the real purport of the text, and not condemnation either of the worship of a deity or of the performance of action; for both the work and the worship produce their appropriate results; both are prescribed by the scriptures and therefore cannot be unworthy of being pursued. Those who are devoted to ignorance, that is to say, to work, enter into darkness, which is characterized by an absence of light. Here ignorance (avidyā) is work, because the latter is opposed to Knowledge (Vidyā). Those who devote themselves to such a ritual as the Agnihotra enter into darkness; into a greater darkness enter those who renounce work and engage in the knowledge of a deity alone. The fruits of both knowledge and work are separately mentioned in order to harmonize knowledge and work. Otherwise the one which was without fruit would be a mere appendage of the one bearing fruit, and in that case no harmony would be possible."

Or the text may mean that there are people who, through conceit, give up work though they are not entitled to do so. They are mere theorists. Some of them indulge in the pursuit of occult knowledge about various deities and neglect the ordinary duties prescribed by religion. They fall victims to greater nescience.

According to a third interpretation, the word vidyā in the text means only the theoretical knowledge of Brahman obtained from study of the scriptures. Those who are endowed with such knowledge are certainly less fortunate than the ritualists, because the latter enjoy some kind of reward, whereas the former obtain nothing at all.

A fourth interpretation of the text is that those who perform ritualistic action go, after death, to a lower heaven called Pitṛiloka and, after reaping there the result of their action, quickly come back to earth and resume the thread of their spiritual evolution; but those who are devoted to the contemplation of a deity go, after death, to Devaloka, the Plane of the Deities (Chandraloka, or the Plane of the Moon). There they dwell a long time enjoying intense material pleasures. Those who come back from the lower heaven perhaps quickly realize the transitory nature of material pleasures;

but those dwelling in the higher heaven, deluded by the enjoyment of more intense pleasures, remain oblivious of the final spiritual goal for a longer time.

*The different results of knowledge (vidyā) and action (avidyā):*

# 10

One thing, they say, is obtained from knowledge; another, they say, from ignorance. Thus we have heard from the wise who have taught us this.

ONE THING: That is to say, the Plane of the Deities.

ANOTHER, ETC: The Plane of the Fathers (Pitṛiloka).

THIS: Both rituals and knowledge of the deities.

The instruction given in this verse has come down through a succession of teachers.

*Though verse ten has described separate results for work and for meditation on a deity, yet the real aim of the Upanishad seems to be their harmonization, which is described in the following verse. In order to emphasize this harmonization, work (or ritualistic action) and meditation on a deity (without appropriate ritualistic action) pursued separately have been condemned in verse nine. When anything laid down by the scriptures meets elsewhere with scriptural disapproval, the real purpose is not the condemnation of the thing in question, but the glorification of something else.*

# 11

He who is aware that both knowledge and ignorance should be pursued together, overcomes death through ignorance and obtains immortality through knowledge.

DEATH: The action and knowledge natural to an unilluminated person are here called death. Such a person does not see anything beyond the sense-perceived world.

IGNORANCE: That is to say, ritualistic actions which reveal to their performers the other planes of existence not perceived by the senses.

IMMORTALITY: The relative immortality enjoyed by the gods in Devaloka. Absolute Immortality, or deathlessness, is not possible without Self-Knowledge.



The text is obscure. It seems, according to verse ten, that those who contemplate a deity (without harmonizing their contemplation with action) go, after death, to Devaloka and dwell there till the result of their good action is exhausted, and those who perform ritualistic actions go to Pitriloka to enjoy the results of their actions. According to verse eleven, it appears that those who harmonize both attain, in the end, the status of a deity and dwell in the heavenly world as long as the cycle lasts, enjoying, as gods, what is called relative immortality.

*In order to harmonize the worship of the unmanifested prakṛiti with that of the manifested Hiranyagarbha, the worship of the one without the other is condemned:*

## 12

Into a blind darkness they enter who worship only the unmanifested prakṛiti; but into a greater darkness they enter who worship the manifested Hiranyagarbha.

**BLIND DARKNESS:** In that state the light of Brahman is not perceived at all, because it then remains under the spell of māyā.

**UNMANIFESTED PRAKRITI:** The state of non-manifestation prior to the creation of names and forms, when the three guṇas—sattva, rajas, and tamas—remain in equilibrium. The disturbance of this equilibrium precipitates creation. This state of non-manifestation (balance) is also known by such names as avidyā (nescience), avyākṛita (the unmanifested), and ajnāna (ignorance). It is the state between two cycles and contains in an unmanifested form—hence the name unmanifested prakṛiti—all the good and evil tendencies and desires of the living beings of the past cycle, which determine the lives of those to be born in the next.

**MANIFESTED HIRANYAGARBHA:** The first manifestation of Brahman in the relative universe. At the beginning of a cycle He is produced from the unmanifested prakṛiti and hence is called the manifested Hiranyagarbha.

*The different results of their worship are described in order to bring about their harmonization:*

## 13

One thing, they say, is obtained from the worship of the manifested; another, they say, from the worship of the unmanifested. Thus we have heard from the wise who taught us this.

**ONE THING ETC:** As a result of worshipping Hiranyagarbha, the devotee obtains such supernatural powers as the ability to reduce himself to the size of an atom, to make himself light as a feather, and to pervade the entire universe. These are characteristics of Hiranyagarbha.

**ANOTHER ETC:** According to the Purāṇas, the result of such worship is absorption in prakṛiti.

The scriptures say that whatever a person worships he becomes after death. He who worships prakṛiti, characterized by nescience, remains merged in prakṛiti for untold years. And he who worships Hiranyagarbha, who is only a manifestation of prakṛiti, obtains a corresponding result.

*The harmonization of both is extolled:*

14 .

He who knows that both the unmanifested prakṛiti and the manifested Hiranyagarbha should be worshipped together, overcomes death by the worship of Hiranyagarbha and obtains immortality through devotion to prakṛiti.

**MANIFESTED HIRANYAGARBHA:** The word vināśa in the text means destruction. Whatever is caused is liable to destruction. Hiranyagarbha, the first individualized manifestation of prakṛiti, is a caused entity; hence His destruction is inevitable.

**OVERCOMES DEATH ETC:** That is to say, triumphs over the limitations of earthly life by the attainment of various supernatural powers through absorption in Hiranyagarbha.

**IMMORTALITY:** The result of this worship is, as stated above, absorption in prakṛiti. The devotee remains so merged till the next creation. The non-differentiated state of prakṛiti, between two creations, endures for an untold number of years and is therefore described as immortality, though in a relative sense.

The result of combining the two kinds of worship described in the text is, first, the attainment of supernatural powers through devotion to Hiranyagarbha, and second, the attainment of immortality (relative) by merging in prakṛiti. The attainment of this immortality is the culmination of the efforts of a man or a god. It is the highest achievement in the relative universe.

*The highest result of the actions prescribed by the scriptures and performed with such material accessories as animals and gold, and also*

*of knowledge of the deities, is, as shown above, absorption in prakṛiti. Here the life of saṃsāra reaches its limit. But all this lies within the realm of relativity and is not the final Liberation. The seeker of Liberation follows the path of Knowledge, renounces all desires, and contemplates Brahman. Thus the Vedas prescribe two paths, one characterized by action, and the other, by renunciation. It has been stated before that meditation on the deities, combined with appropriate rituals, enables one to enjoy relative immortality. The following verse describes a fervent death-bed prayer to the sun, on the part of such a worshipper, to help him realize his cherished desire.*

## 15

The door of the Truth is covered by a golden disc. Open it, O Nourisher! Remove it so that I who have been worshipping the Truth may behold It.

**TRUTH:** Referring to the manifestation of Brahman in the sun. The sun is often used as a symbol of Brahman. "That which is Truth is that sun." (Br. Up. V. v. 1-4.) Here the sun includes earth, heaven, and the interspace and is known also by the name of Vyāriti. The sun is personified, with earth, heaven, and the interspace as its head, two arms, and two feet. The worship prescribed in this and the following verses is the symbolic worship of Brahman through the sun.

**COVERED:** It is hidden from the view of people who are without self-control.

**GOLDEN:** Luminous.

**NOURISHER:** The sun's rays nourish the world.

## 16

O Nourisher, lone Traveller of the sky! Controller! O Sun, Offspring of Prajāpati! Gather Your rays; withdraw Your light. I would see, through Your grace, that form of Yours which is the fairest. I am indeed He, that Puruṣa, who dwells there.

**THAT FORM ETC:** Referring to Brahman manifest through the symbol of the sun.

**I AM INDEED ETC:** The devotee is not, like a servant, asking a favour. He is conscious of his identity with the deity.

**HE:** That is to say, the resplendent figure in the sun.

**PURUṢA:** Lit., Person. It also refers to the Godhead, who *lies* in the hearts of all, or who *fills* the whole universe with life and consciousness.

*The prayer of the dying man continues:*

17

Now may my breath return to the all-pervading, immortal Prāna! May this body be burnt to ashes! Om. O mind, remember, remember all that I have done.

**PRĀNA:** Cosmic Life; another name of Brahmā, or Hiranyagarbha.

**MAY THIS BODY ETC:** That is to say, may the subtle body (linga śarira) come out of the gross body. According to the Vedic seers, a subtle body dwells inside and pervades the gross body. The impressions of a man's good and evil deeds and thoughts remain embedded in this subtle body. The individual soul dwelling in this body experiences, after death, the happy or unhappy results of its actions. The gross body is destroyed after death, but the subtle body remains unimpaired till the attainment of Liberation through Knowledge.

**OM:** Om is a symbol of Brahman. It is used here as a symbol of the sun to show the identity of Brahman and the deity controlling the sun. The word Om is uttered at the beginning of a worship. (See p. 138.)

**REMEMBER:** That is to say, a man should think only of his good deeds at the time of death.

The thought occupying the mind in the hour of death determines the course of the soul after death. An evil thought brings an evil result, and a good thought, a good one. Therefore the dying man should fill his mind with good thoughts alone. That is why the name and glories of God are chanted at the time of death. But it should be remembered that only he who leads a righteous life can, while dying, spontaneously and sincerely cherish good thoughts; otherwise the exhortations of priests or friends to lift the mind to a higher plane do not produce any result. The impressions of the thoughts and actions of a whole life crowd into a man's mind when he is dying.

*The dying man again prays for a higher course after death:*

18

O Fire, lead us by the good path for the enjoyment of the fruit of our action. You know, O god, all our deeds. Destroy our sin of deceit. We offer, by words, our salutations to you.

**FIRE:** During Vedic times twice-born householders worshipped fire and offered their oblations in it. Fire was considered as the intermediary god through whom oblations to the other gods were made.

**GOOD PATH:** That is to say, the Northern Path, travelling by which the departed soul attains, by stages, to Liberation. The text refers to the devotee who has gone to heaven many a time by following the Southern Path and is satiated with it. Now he wants to follow the Northern Path, which will not bring him back to earth again. (See p. 70.)

**DEEDS:** This also includes thoughts.

**DESTROY ETC:** The devotee wants to acquire purity in order to attain his cherished goal.

**BY WORDS:** At the time of death the devotee cannot offer any other worship to the god. As his limbs become inert, he cannot prostrate himself; hence the salutations through words alone.

The following is adapted from Śankara's commentary:

"Verses eleven and fourteen mention the results of devotion to ignorance (avidyā) and Hiranyagarbha as death, and of devotion to knowledge (vidyā) and the unmanifested prakṛiti as immortality (relative). Some take exception to our interpretation of these verses. We shall now try briefly to answer their objections. The objector asks why one should not, by knowledge, mean the Knowledge of the Supreme Self, and by immortality, the ultimate Liberation. The Upanishad here explicitly lays down, they say, the injunction to pursue together the Knowledge of the Supreme Self and ritualistic worship. The words of scripture are the final authority. Though Knowledge and ignorance (ritualistic worship) are said to produce contradictory results, yet this objection cannot stand in view of the clear statement of the Upanishad referred to above. To this objection we answer that Knowledge and ignorance cannot, by any means, be reconciled, because they are contradictory both as to their nature and as to their ultimate result. The cause of ignorance is false identification of Ātman with the body and the rest, but true Knowledge is completely different. The result of ignorance is entanglement in the world, and that of Knowledge, liberation from the world. Therefore they cannot be harmonized. It cannot be contended that Knowledge and rituals may be pursued alternately, because no sooner does a man attain Self-Knowledge than his identification of the Self with the body disappears. In that case not even the slightest trace of ignorance can inhere in him. If one has known that it is the nature of fire to be luminous and hot, one can never again doubt this conclusion or form a different idea about fire's nature. The knower of the Self is beyond doubt and delusion. For him ignorance has been totally destroyed. Hence he cannot practise any ritualistic action, which, as we have repeated, is the result of ignorance. Therefore in verse nine the word vidyā does not refer to Self-Knowledge, but to knowledge of a deity. Had it not been so, the dying man would not have asked, in verse eighteen, for a good path leading to immortality; for the knower of the Self does not follow any path after giving

up the body, nor does he go anywhere. He at once attains identity with the supreme, attributeless Brahman. Hence the word immortality mentioned in verses eleven and fourteen does not mean ultimate Liberation but means only a long life in heaven. For all these reasons we think that our interpretation of the verses referred to above, namely, the harmonization of ritualistic worship with the contemplation of a deity and not with the Knowledge of the Supreme Self, is correct."

The *Īśa Upanishad*, according to Śankara's interpretation, states clearly the position of Non-dualistic Vedānta with reference to Christianity, Judaism, Islām, popular Hinduism, and other faiths. These religions exhort their devotees to combine worship with the contemplation of a deity, the result being immortality in a heavenly world. Non-dualistic Vedānta accepts all this but points out that the immortality sought by this method is not the Vedāntic Liberation but a long life of happiness either in Brahmaloka or in a lower heaven. As we have said before, those who go to lower heavens return to earth after exhausting the results of their meritorious actions, and the fortunate dwellers in Brahmaloka attain final Liberation after the completion of the cycle.

*Here ends the Īśa Upanishad.*

## THE PEACE CHANT

**Om. That is full; this is full. This fullness has been projected from that fullness. When this fullness merges in that fullness, all that remains is fullness.**

**Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!**

# KENA UPANISHAD



## INTRODUCTION

THE *KENA UPANISHAD*—so called because it begins with the word *Kena*—is also known as the *Talavakāra Upanishad* because it forms the ninth chapter of the *Talavakāra Brāhmaṇa* of the Sāma-Veda. The preceding eight chapters of the *Brāhmaṇa* deal with rites, sacrifices, meditation on the deities, and such cognate matters as are necessary for the purification of the aspirant's heart and also for the practice of concentration. The aim of the *Kena Upanishad*, like that of all the other Upanishads, is to teach the knowledge of the oneness of Ātman and Brahman. Only through such knowledge can a man become free from delusion and attain Bliss and Freedom.

The *Kena Upanishad* is divided into four chapters. The first two are in the form of a dialogue between a disciple and his spiritual preceptor. The first chapter states that the sense-organs and the mind, which are material entities, cannot perform their functions intelligently without the help of Ātman, or Pure Consciousness. Ātman Itself cannot be comprehended by any of them. It remains for ever unknown to and unknowable by the senses and the mind. If an unilluminated person, we read in the second chapter, boasts that he has known Brahman, he really knows very little of It. But the truly wise man realizes that the infinite and attributeless Brahman can never be an object of knowledge. A finite object may indicate some of the attributes of Brahman but can never reveal Its true nature. On the other hand, the analysis of mental states points to the presence of Pure Consciousness in man. The mind itself is an inert, material entity; but it is transparent and on that account reflects the light of Pure Consciousness. Through the help of this light it is able to reveal objects. Therefore, according to the instruction of the *Kena Upanishad*, Brahman should be meditated upon as the Pure Intelligence underlying every mental state. Through practice of the proper spiritual disciplines, a seeker can realize Brahman in this very life. It need not be only an after-death experience.

The third and fourth chapters describe, through a parable, the

inability of the finite senses to realize the infinite Brahman. In a battle between the gods and the demons, so the story runs, the former won the victory but claimed the glory for themselves, forgetting that they were mere instruments of Brahman, the Supreme Lord. In order to remove this delusion the Lord appeared at a distance as a Spirit. The gods of fire and wind, conscious of their power, approached It to learn who It was, but did not succeed. Then Indra, the king of the gods, came forward. The Spirit vanished and there appeared in Its place a Woman of exquisite beauty, who taught Indra that the gods had won the victory through the power and grace of the Supreme Lord alone. He was further told that Brahman was the real operator and that they were mere instruments. As a result of this instruction, Indra and the gods of fire and wind gained pre-eminence among the gods.

The philosophy underlying this story seems to be as follows: The gods stand for the psychic forces that control the sense-organs. Indra, or I-consciousness, is their ruler. The demons represent a man's evil passions. Now and then the senses are able to overcome a passion and get a sudden glimpse of Ātman. Then they proudly feel that they can understand Ātman's whole nature. The organ of speech (Agni, or Fire) thinks it can know the whole of Brahman. Prāna, the vital force (Vāyu, or Wind), thinks it alone controls man's activity. They soon realize, however, the futility of their power and beat a retreat. Then the ego, or the individual soul (Indra), chastened and humbled, steps forward, and the vision of Ātman vanishes. There appears before him Grace (Umā, the consort of the Lord), who is the Power of Brahman (Śakti) and also the Wisdom of the Vedas (Brahmavidyā). She destroys the wrong notion of the ego and the senses and ultimately reveals the truth of Brahman. Thus the aspirant attains the supreme Knowledge. It should be noted that one cannot even have a glimpse of the indwelling Ātman unless the evil passions are subdued.

The Upanishad ends with two kinds of meditation on Brahman and an enumeration of the disciplines for Its attainment.

S. N.

## ŚRĪ ŚĀNKARĀCHĀRYA'S INTRODUCTION

NOW BEGINS the ninth chapter<sup>1</sup> in order to introduce the Kena Upanishad, which treats of the Supreme Brahman. Prior to this<sup>2</sup> all the karmas have been fully explained, and likewise the meditation on the prāṇas, which is the support of all rituals, and those meditations also which treat of the sāmāns, the auxiliaries of karma.

Then follow descriptions of the Gāyatri Sāman and the Vamśa, or genealogical list of preceptors and disciples. When all these rituals and meditations described above are faithfully performed, they tend to purify the mind of the seeker of Liberation who is free from desires. On the other hand, he who performs the actions laid down in the Śrutis and Smritis, but cherishes desires and is devoid of knowledge, follows, as a result, the Southern Path<sup>3</sup> and returns to saṁsāra.<sup>4</sup>

But those who, following their natural impulses, engage in action forbidden by the scriptures degrade themselves and are reborn in lower bodies, ranging from beasts to unmoving objects.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Kena Upanishad forms the ninth chapter of a Brāhmana belonging to the Sāma-Veda. The Vedas are in the main divided into two sections, namely, the Mantra and the Brāhmana, which latter includes most of the Upanishads. According to Ānandagiri, the Kena Upanishad belongs to the recension of the Talavakāras.

<sup>2</sup> That is to say, in the eight preceding chapters, which deal with various sacrifices and forms of ritualistic worship conducive to the happiness, here and hereafter, of their performers. When these worships are performed without any desire for earthly or celestial gain, they purify the heart. It is the contention of Śāṅkarāchārya that karma (ritualistic worship or humanitarian activities) cannot directly bring about Liberation but is necessary for the purification of the heart, without which a man cannot cultivate the Knowledge of Brahman.

<sup>3</sup> A reference to the path followed after death by those who engage in the various duties of life laid down in the scriptures with a view to enjoying happiness here and hereafter. (See p. 70.)

<sup>4</sup> The relative world characterized by birth and death, pain and pleasure, and the other pairs of opposites.

<sup>5</sup> It should be remembered that, according to Vedānta, Ātman, or the real Soul, is free from birth and death. But under the spell of māyā, It cherishes desires and assumes bodies, high and low, for the fulfilment of those desires. Ultimately all souls attain Self-Knowledge and Liberation.

In support of the above, the Vedas say: "[Those who perform action under the compulsion of their natural desires] do not travel either by the Northern<sup>6</sup> or the Southern Path. They are born as small creatures [such as worms and insects], victims of repeated births and deaths. 'Be born and die'—such is the third path." Another passage in the Vedas says: "Three kinds of living beings [namely, those born from wombs and from eggs, and those born of earth, such as trees and creepers], unable to travel by either of these paths, attain a miserable end."

But he who is pure in heart and free from desires, and who, on account of the good tendencies produced as the result of meritorious work done in this or in a previous birth, cultivates detachment from external and transitory actions, characterized by means and ends, makes inquiries into the nature of the innermost Self. This very subject is discussed in the Kena Upanishad—which has derived its name from the first word of the book, Keneshitam—in the form of questions and answers.

The Katha Upanishad (II. i. 1.) states: "The self-existent Supreme Lord inflicted an injury upon the sense-organs in creating them with outgoing tendencies; therefore a man perceives only outer objects with them, and not the inner Self. But a calm person, wishing for Immortality, beholds the inner Self with his eyes closed."

The Mundaka Upanishad (I. ii. 12.) states: "Let a brāhmin, after having examined all these worlds which are gained by works, acquire freedom from desires: nothing that is eternal can be produced by what is not eternal. In order that he may understand that Eternal, let him, fuel in hand, approach a guru who is well versed in the Vedas and always devoted to Brahman."

Thus alone, and not otherwise, does a man who is free from desires become qualified to hear about, meditate on, and acquire knowledge of the inmost Self. By the knowledge of the identity of the inmost Self and Brahman, *ajñāna* (ignorance), which is the seed of *samsāra* and the cause of desires and of the flow of activity, is entirely destroyed. The Vedas say: "How can there be delusion and how can there be grief for him who sees oneness?" "The knower of *Ātman* overcomes grief." "The fetters of the heart are broken, all doubts are resolved, and all works cease to bear fruit, when He is beheld who is both high and low." (Mu. Up. II. ii. 8.)

It may be contended that knowledge combined with action can

<sup>6</sup> The path leading to Brahmaloka. (See p. 70.)

enable one to attain the above-mentioned result. The answer is in the negative. The Brihadāranyaka Upanishad states that such a combination produces different results. A verse of that Upanishad begins: "Let me have a wife," and then goes on to say: "By begetting a son alone is this world gained, and not by other actions; by karma, the World of the Fathers; and by knowledge, the World of the Gods." Thus the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad asserts that the combination of karma and knowledge results in the attainment of the three worlds, and not of Ātman. The same scripture urges a man to become a wandering sannyāsin and gives the following reason: "What shall we achieve through children—we who have attained this Self, this world?" The meaning of the statement is this: "What shall we achieve through children, karma, and the combination of karma and knowledge, which are the means to attain the worlds of mortals, of the fathers, and of the gods, and which do not enable us to secure the world of Ātman? We certainly do not desire the three transitory worlds attainable by those means."<sup>7</sup> To us that World alone is desirable which is uncaused, birthless, undecaying, and fearless, which does not increase or decrease by karma, and which is eternal. Because it is eternal, that World cannot be attained by any other means but the destruction of ignorance. Therefore we should bear in mind the knowledge of the non-duality of the inmost Self and Brahman and renounce all desires.

Another reason for what has been said above is that the knowledge of the non-duality of the inmost Self and Brahman is antagonistic to karma. Karma presupposes the knowledge of the distinction between doer and result, but the unitive knowledge of the inmost Self and Brahman puts an end to the perception of distinctions. Therefore karma and the Knowledge of the inmost Self cannot coexist.

Furthermore, the Knowledge of Brahman depends entirely upon the reality of Brahman Itself, and not upon the will of the knower.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Anything that is attained through extraneous means comes to an end. Every effect in the causal world is transitory.

<sup>8</sup> Knowledge depends on the object of knowledge, but an action depends upon the will of the doer. Knowledge, whether true or false, must arise when a sense-organ comes in contact with an object. The knower cannot avoid it. But the doer may engage in an action or desist from it or act in any other way he likes. Therefore an action is dependent upon the will of the doer. When, by means of proper disciplines, an aspirant becomes ready, the Knowledge of Brahman must shine forth within him. He has no option of knowing or not knowing Brahman or of knowing It differently. So the scriptural injunctions regarding actions cannot produce the Knowledge of Brahman. There is no scope for karma with regard to Brahman, which admits of no distinction.

*Therefore the inquiry into Brahman as being connected with the inmost Self, by a person who has renounced all visible<sup>9</sup> and invisible<sup>10</sup> rewards achievable by external means, is introduced in the Kena Upanishad beginning with Keneshitam etc.*

*The subject matter is extremely subtle. Hence its elucidation in the form of a dialogue between a disciple and his preceptor for the purpose of its easy understanding. The dialogue also clearly points out that the Knowledge of Brahman cannot be attained by means of mere logical discussion. The Vedas say: "This Knowledge cannot be attained by reasoning." "He who has studied under a preceptor knows." "The knowledge that is obtained from a teacher becomes fruitful." The Bhagavad Gītā says: "Learn it by prostration [before a teacher]." Therefore it can be imagined that someone who had not found refuge anywhere except in the Knowledge of the inmost Self and who desired what was fearless, eternal, all good, and immutable, duly approached a teacher who was firmly established in Brahman and asked him the questions with which the Kena Upanishad begins.*

<sup>9</sup> On this earth.

<sup>10</sup> In the world beyond.

## INVOCATION

**Om. May Brahman protect us both (the preceptor and the disciple)! May Brahman bestow upon us both the fruit of Knowledge! May we both obtain the energy to acquire Knowledge! May what we both study reveal the Truth! May we cherish no ill feeling toward each other!**

**Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!**

**Om. May the different parts of my body, my tongue, prāna, eyes, ears, and my strength, and also all the other sense-organs, be nourished! All, indeed, is Brahman, as is declared in the Upanishads. May I never deny Brahman! May Brahman never deny me! May there never be denial on the part of Brahman! May there never be denial on my part! May all the virtues described in the Upanishads belong to me who am devoted to Brahman! Yea, may they all belong to me!**

**Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!**

## CHAPTER I

**THE DISCIPLE ASKED:** Om. By whose will directed does the mind proceed to its object? At whose command does the prāna, the foremost, do its duty? At whose will do men utter speech? Who is the god that directs the eyes and ears?

**DOES THE MIND ETC:** It is commonly believed that the mind thinks of objects independently of any outside will. But this is not true. The mind is not its own master; otherwise an intelligent person would not contemplate evil. It is a common experience that the mind, although conscious of the harmful result to follow, sometimes thinks of an evil object. In spite of being warned by others, it is impelled to undertake an action fraught with serious consequences. Therefore it is but right to surmise that the mind is not altogether free in its activities.

**THE PRĀNA ETC:** The prāna, or life-force, is described as the foremost, since without it the sense-organs cannot engage in their activities.

**THE GOD:** Lit., luminous being. The sense-organs, themselves inert and unintelligent, must be directed in their activities by some intelligent power.

It is a common belief that the body, consisting of senses and limbs, directs a person to action, and that the mind also is under the control of the body. But an intelligent person realizes that the body, the senses, and the mind—in fact, all things in an embodied person except the inmost Self—are mutable, material, and impermanent. The mind and the rest engage in their respective functions by the mere will of Ātman. The disciple asks the teacher about this immutable and everlasting Ātman.

*The disciple being well qualified for knowledge, the First Principle was explained to him.*

### 2

**The teacher replied:** It is the Ear of the ear, the Mind of the mind, the Speech of speech, the Life of life, and the Eye of the eye. Having detached the Self [from the sense-organs] and renounced the world, the wise attain to Immortality.



**THE EAR OF THE EAR:** The second word ear in the text denotes the instrument of hearing which is the subtle organ behind the outer ear, by means of which one hears a sound. According to the Upanishads, however, the organ itself is not the real agent of hearing. It functions in that way because of the presence of Ātman, the luminous, all-pervading, and eternal Intelligence. Compare the following Vedic statements: "Man shines by the light of Ātman." "Illumined by that Light, the sun shines." Also compare the following statement of the Bhagavad Gītā: "The light that is in the sun and illumines the whole universe, the light that is in the moon and is likewise in fire—know that light to be Mine." The false notion that the sense-organs themselves are endowed with intelligence is denied by the text. "There is something which can be comprehended only by the understanding of the wise and which is the innermost Self of all, immutable, undecaying, immortal, fearless, and birthless, and at whose direction the ear, the tongue, the mind and the other senses perform their respective functions. The reply of the teacher to this effect and our interpretation of it are correct." (*Śaṅkarāchārya*.)

**THE MIND ETC:** See the foregoing note. Unless animated by the intelligence of Ātman, the mind cannot perform its functions of volition and determination. The word mind here includes both the manas (the doubting faculty) and the buddhi (the determinative faculty).

**THE LIFE ETC:** The word in the text is prāṇa. It is Ātman which endows the prāṇa with the power to discharge its functions, such as breathing, ejecting unassimilated food and drink, and carrying nourishment all through the body. Compare the following statements of the Vedas: "Who could live and who could breathe if there were no Brahman, the Embodiment of Bliss?" "He leads prāṇa up and apāna down." "That alone is Brahman which endows the prāṇa with activity. Know That."

**THE EYE ETC:** The eyes reveal forms. The power of revealing objects is derived from Ātman, which is of the nature of intelligence.

**HAVING DETACHED ETC:** The knowledge that Ātman is the Eye of the eye, and so on, enables the seeker to detach himself from the sense-organs. This knowledge leads to the attainment of Immortality. But the unillumined person identifies the eyes, the ears, and the other sense-organs with Ātman and thus becomes a victim of recurring birth and death in the relative universe.

**RENOUNCED ETC:** The wise man turns himself away from this world, where life is characterized by attachment to transitory objects, such as friends and relatives. He renounces all worldly desires. "Neither by action nor by offspring nor by wealth, but by renunciation alone is Immortality attained." "The wise man seeking Immortality withdraws his senses from

the world." Or the word in the text may mean *after the discarding of the body*. Even for a knower of Brahman, the physical body lasts as long as the residue of the past karma that has given rise to it is not exhausted. He must reap its fruit.

According to Vedānta, Ātman, or Pure Consciousness, is free from activity, yet Its existence can be inferred from the activities of the sense-organs. A sense-organ is not a simple substance. It consists of particles of various material elements. Such a substance is under the control of another entity whose purpose it serves, as is true of a house or a vehicle. This entity is Ātman, for whose sake the sense-organs perform their respective functions. Furthermore, an unintelligent object cannot work without the direction of an intelligent entity, as is true of a coach. The sense-organs by themselves are unintelligent. It is the intelligent Ātman who directs them.

*Brahman cannot be known by the mind or the senses, because It is the very Ātman, or inmost Self of man.*

## 3-4

The eye does not go thither, nor speech, nor the mind. We do not know It; we do not understand how anyone can teach It. It is different from the known; It is above the unknown. Thus we have heard from the preceptors of old who taught It to us.

**THE EYE ETC:** Brahman alone exists. All other objects, such as the body, the senses, and the mind, are falsely superimposed upon It, like an illusory snake upon a rope. As the rope is the true essence and self of the illusory snake, so Brahman is the essence and self of the eye, speech, the mind, and the rest. This essence, or Brahman, is Consciousness, the eternal and infinite Subject; It cannot be made an object of the material and finite senses.

**SPEECH:** The tongue defines an object by means of words. The words are said to meet the object. But Brahman is the very essence and self of all, including both the words and the tongue that utters them. Therefore speech cannot define Brahman. Fire, which burns and illumines other objects, cannot burn or illumine itself.

**MIND:** The mind applies its volitional and determinative power with respect to other objects and not to Brahman, which is its inmost essence.

**WE DO NOT KNOW ETC:** Only objects are perceived by the senses and the mind; Brahman, the eternal Subject, cannot be known by them.

**WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND ETC:** It is not possible for a teacher to explain Brahman to a disciple, as he would a sense-perceived object, which is described with reference to its class, attributes, and modes of activity. Brahman is devoid of all these. This part of the text is meant to spur the teacher to an intense effort to instruct the disciple about the inscrutable Brahman and also to spur the disciple to an intense effort to understand the instruction. "It is no doubt true that one cannot be made to believe in Brahman by the evidence of the sense-organs; yet one can cultivate faith in It from the evidence of the scriptures." (*Śankarāchārya*.)

**IT IS ABOVE ETC:** Brahman is different from the known, that is to say, from the tangible world of name and form, because It is the Eye of the eye, and so on. All tangible objects can be known somehow, by someone, and to some extent. Brahman is quite different from such objects. Lest the disciple should misunderstand the statement of the teacher and conclude that Brahman is altogether unknown, the preceptor says that It is above the unknown. The word unknown means the unmanifested avidyā, which is the seed of the gross universe. By describing Brahman as both distinct from the known and above the unknown, the text indicates that Brahman is Ātman, or the inmost Self of the knower; for none other than one's own Ātman can be distinct from both the known and the unknown. The purpose of this verse is to reiterate the oneness of Brahman and Ātman.

**THUS WE HAVE ETC:** The Knowledge of Ātman has been handed down through a succession of preceptors and disciples. "Brahman can be known only by instruction from preceptors, and not by means of argument, exposition, the scriptures, intelligence, austerities, sacrifices, and the like." (*Śankarāchārya*.)

*The foregoing verse raises a difficulty. It may be asked how Brahman can be Ātman. It is a general belief that Ātman, or the Self, is a phenomenal entity who performs action and worship in order to attain heaven or to commune with the gods, and who is subject to the law of rebirth. Therefore Brahman may refer to some other deity, such as Vishnu, Indra, or Išvara, who is entitled to our worship, and not to the Self. Several schools accept this view. Hence it is but proper to conclude that what is known and fit to be worshipped is Brahman and that the Self, that is to say, the worshipper, is something different from It. Anticipating some such difficulty on the part of the disciple, the teacher said in reply that Ātman is none other than Pure Intelligence, without which the senses cannot function.*

That which cannot be expressed by speech, but by which speech is expressed—That alone know as Brahman, and not that which people here worship.

**SPEECH:** The term denotes both the words and the organ of speech. The organ is a finite instrument.

**BY WHICH ETC:** That is to say, the inert tongue can utter words only through the light and sentiency which are the true nature of Brahman. Compare: "Remaining inside speech, Brahman directs it." "That is speech by which one speaks in dreams." The Power behind speech is eternal and by nature intelligent. Compare: "The Power behind the speech of the speaker always exists."

**THAT ALONE:** The light which is the Self, devoid of the limitations of the organs, the body, and the rest.

**BRAHMAN:** The word is derived from the root *brimha*, which indicates greatness that has not been surpassed by anything else. Brahman is one and without a second. Devoid of attributes, utterly transcendent, the Supreme, and a homogeneous mass of Consciousness, It has been described—in association with such upādhis, or limiting adjuncts, as speech, the eye, and the ear—as "the Speech of speech," "the Ear of the ear," and the "Eye of the eye." The seeker of Brahman should discard all upādhis and realize It as Pure Consciousness.

**NOT THAT ETC:** Referring to the deities endowed with positive attributes. They are not the real Brahman, but Brahman limited by specific names and forms. This clause is added in order to emphasize the idea that what is non-Self is also not Brahman. Ātman alone is to be regarded as Brahman. One should not see Brahman in what is not Ātman.

The Vedānta philosophy recognizes in all experience a fundamental distinction between the Subject and the object, the "Seer" and the "seen," the Ego and the non-Ego. The Subject is the perceiver, identical with the "Seer" and the Ego. It is, by nature, Consciousness and Intelligence. The object is the thing perceived, identical with the "seen" and the non-Ego. It is inert and insentient. The Subject is Ātman, or Brahman; the object includes the material universe, the body, the senses, and the mind, as all of these are perceived or apprehended by the Consciousness that is the true nature of Ātman. The activity or the intelligence associated with such material objects as the body, the senses, and the mind is derivative and not intrinsic. When a red-hot iron is seen to burn an object, the burning is really done by the fire in the iron and not by the iron itself. Likewise, when the sense-organs perceive or apprehend an object, it is really Ātman that does so, using them as Its instruments.

*Furthermore:*

6

That which cannot be apprehended by the mind, but by which, they say, the mind is apprehended—That alone know as Brahman, and not that which people here worship.

**THAT WHICH ETC:** The word *manas* in the text includes both the mind (the doubting faculty) and the intellect (the determinative faculty). The mind is the inner organ by which one thinks. Hence it is equally connected with all the sense-organs; it pervades all objects. According to the *Brihad-āraṇyaka Upanishad*, desire, volition, deliberation, scepticism, patience, impatience, bashfulness, intellect, fear—all these are mind, that is to say, they are states of mind. A man cannot know what *Ātman* is by means of the mind described above. *Ātman* is the controller of the mind and the perceiver of its different states. The mind's power to think is derived from the light of *Ātman* shining within, by which the mind and all its different states are pervaded. Therefore one should know That to be Brahman which is the Consciousness behind the mind.

The seer sees an object because the seer is one and unchanging. The various objects of the world, different from one another in size, colour, or shape, and changeable by nature, are perceived by the eye. The eye itself, relatively speaking, is one and unchanging. The same is true of the other senses. Again, the eye, with its changing characteristics of keenness, dullness, or blindness, is the object, and the mind is the subject, because the mind, relatively speaking, is a unity. Finally, the mind, endowed with such changing characteristics as desire, doubt, determination, constancy, belief, fear, and fearlessness, is the object, and it is perceived by the Self, or Consciousness, because the latter is a unity. The Self, unlike the senses and the mind, is the ultimate Subject or Perceiver. The Consciousness belonging to the Self exists eternally. One cannot speak of Its birth, growth, decay, or death. As stated in the note on the previous verse, the intelligence or the activity associated with the mind and the sense-organs is derived from *Ātman*.

*Furthermore:*

7

That which cannot be perceived by the eye, but by which the eye is perceived—That alone know as Brahman, and not that which people here worship.

PERCEIVED: As an object.

BY WHICH ETC: It is by the light of Ātman that one perceives the different conditions of the eyes.

*Furthermore:*

8

That which cannot be heard by the ear, but by which the hearing is perceived—That alone know as Brahman, and not that which people here worship.

BY WHICH ETC: The ear, like the other sense-organs, is inert. Its power of hearing is derived from Ātman.

*Furthermore:*

9

That which cannot be smelt by the breath, but by which the breath smells an object—That alone know as Brahman, and not that which people here worship.

SMELT ETC: It is by means of the breath (prāna), which functions in the nostrils, that one smells an object. The nature of Ātman cannot be known by smell.

BY WHICH ETC: When illumined by the light of Ātman, the organ of smell functions.

*Here ends the First Chapter  
of the Kena Upanishad.*

## CHAPTER II

**THE TEACHER SAID:** If you think: "I know Brahman well," then surely you know but little of Its form; you know only Its form as conditioned by man or by the gods. Therefore Brahman, even now, is worthy of your inquiry.

*The disciple said:* I think I know Brahman.

**IF YOU THINK ETC:** The teacher was afraid that the disciple, after hearing that Brahman was Ātman, might conclude that Brahman was the ego.

"**I KNOW BRAHMAN WELL**": Brahman cannot, like other tangible objects, be an object of a man's knowledge. Fire can burn all combustible things, but not itself. Likewise, the knower can know all such objects as are capable, by their very nature, of being known by him; but he can never know, in a like manner, his own Self. That Brahman alone is the inmost Self of all knowers is the unanimous conclusion of all Vedāntists. The previous verses have described Brahman as the Eye of the eye, the Ear of the ear, and so on, and thus have emphasized the non-duality of Brahman and Ātman. Furthermore, there is no other knower or perceiving consciousness by which Brahman can be known. Therefore any false notion of the disciple to the effect that he has known Brahman well, as an object, should be dispelled. It is a common experience that a teaching extremely difficult to comprehend is understood only by the man whose mental barriers have been destroyed, and not by others. It is also noticed that of several disciples receiving the same instruction from a common teacher, some understand his words properly, some twist them, some get a completely opposite meaning, and some do not understand at all. If it is so in the case of ordinary matters, it is all the more true in regard to Ātman, which belongs to the realm of the supersensuous. The logicians have conflicting views regarding Ātman. Some say that Ātman is eternal and enjoys after-death experiences; some say that It is non-eternal and perishes with the destruction of the body. Therefore the doubt with which the text begins is quite proper.

**BUT LITTLE ETC:** Many, indeed, are the manifestations of Brahman in the relative world conditioned by names and forms. All objects—from the highest Deity to the blade of grass—are so many forms of Brahman limited by upādhis, which are created by māyā. Not one of them represents

the true nature of Brahman. Brahman, according to the Vedas, is free of sound, touch, form, name, and other attributes.

**ITS FORM AS CONDITIONED ETC:** The forms of Brahman conditioned by the bodies and minds of men and gods are only insignificant manifestations of It in time and space. The gist of the passage is that Brahman, free from all limitations, is infinite, non-dual, sublime, and eternal and therefore cannot be described as well known by anyone.

**I THINK I KNOW ETC:** The disciple listened to the advice of the teacher, went into solitude, and deliberated on the instruction with one-pointed mind. Then he understood its import by means of proper reasoning and, what is more, experienced it as tangibly as one sees a fruit in the palm of one's hand. Then he returned and said to the teacher that he had known the truth regarding Brahman.

*The disciple was not shaken by the words of the teacher, who wanted to test his conviction. He remembered what the teacher had said about Brahman, namely, that It is distinct from the known and above the unknown. He reasoned about the statement and verified its truth by his own experience.*

## 2

*The disciple said:* I do not think I know It well, nor do I think I do not know It. He among us who knows the meaning of "Neither do I not know, nor do I know"—knows Brahman.

It may appear that there is a contradiction in the disciple's statement. If a thing is unknown, then it cannot be said to be known. If, on the other hand, a thing is known, then certainly it cannot be said to be unknown. To describe a thing as both known and unknown is possible only for a person who is a victim of doubt or hallucination. Such a statement about Brahman is contradictory, because the Knowledge of Brahman removes all doubts, errors, and conflicts. Deeper reflection on this verse will, however, remove the apparent contradiction. Brahman is devoid of attributes and actions; therefore It cannot be known as a pot or a jar or any other external object can be known. Hence it is proper to say that one cannot know Brahman well. On the other hand, Brahman exists in all beings as their inmost Self. No one can deny the Self. Even a doubter or negator of the Self thinks only in the light of the Self. Everyone is sure of his self but does not know its true nature. So it is not altogether unknown. Therefore one cannot say that one does not know Brahman at all. That is why it was not improper for the disciple to say: "Neither do I not know, nor do I know."



*The Upanishad now discontinues the method of questions and answers and states its own views regarding the attitude of the illumined soul toward Brahman.*

## 3

He by whom Brahman is not known, knows It; he by whom It is known, knows It not. It is not known by those who know It; It is known by those who do not know It.

HE BY WHOM BRAHMAN IS NOT KNOWN ETC: Refers to the real knower of Brahman.

HE BY WHOM IT IS KNOWN ETC: Refers to the unillumined person who falsely asserts that he knows Brahman.

NOT KNOWN BY THOSE ETC: Refers to knowers of Brahman, who say that they do not know It.

IT IS KNOWN BY THOSE ETC: Refers to those whose knowledge of Brahman is imperfect and not to those who are totally ignorant; to the latter the thought of the Knowledge of Brahman does not even occur. The imperfect knower sees Ātman as conditioned by such limiting adjuncts as the mind, the intellect, and the senses. He does not see Ātman free from upādhis. He confuses his notion of intellect, mind, and the rest with the Knowledge of Brahman. Thus to the imperfect knower Brahman only appears to be known; It is not really known.

If a thing is endowed with a form or attributes, it can be expressed by words or comprehended by thought. But if it is devoid of these, all efforts of the mind and the sense-organs to understand it are futile. Brahman is devoid of form, name, and qualities. Further, the mind itself is non-luminous: its apparent luminosity is derived from the light of Ātman. Lastly, the power of the mind is limited. The more it contemplates Brahman and realizes Its true greatness and glories, the more it understands that it can never grasp Its full nature. To the illumined soul, therefore, Brahman remains, as it were, unknown. But the unillumined person, unable to comprehend Brahman, regards one of Its upādhis as Brahman and thus concludes that he has known Brahman. What he has known is in reality the mind, the buddhi, or some other upādhi of Brahman.

*If Brahman is not known at all, it may then be contended that an ordinary worldly person cannot be distinguished from an illumined one. This objection is denied:*

Brahman is known when It is realized in every state of mind; for by such Knowledge one attains Immortality. By Ātman one obtains strength; by Knowledge, Immortality.

**EVERY STATE OF MIND:** The word *bodha* in the text means mental experience. That by which all states of the mind are illumined and also perceived like objects is Ātman. Though Itself pure intelligence and the witness, Ātman shines through each and every experience of the mind. He who knows Ātman as the illuminer and the witness of all mental states knows It well indeed. Ātman is free from birth and death, unconditioned and non-dual, though dwelling in all beings.

**IMMORTALITY:** Immortality is the very nature of Ātman. It is not something which Ātman acquires from outside. If Ātman is regarded as mortal, this is because It is identified, through ignorance, with such perishable objects as the body or the sense-organs.

**STRENGTH:** That is to say, the power which enables one to attain Immortality. The strength gained through wealth, health, mantras (magical words), medicine, austerities, or yoga cannot overcome death, because such strength is derived from causes which are themselves impermanent. The Knowledge of Ātman is strength itself.

**BY KNOWLEDGE, ETC:** The Knowledge of Ātman is itself Immortality. Death results from ignorance. Knowledge destroys the veil of ignorance and reveals the deathless nature of Ātman. The knower of Ātman may assume or discard bodies as he would garments, but he always remains conscious of his immortality.

According to Vedānta, the mind itself is a material entity devoid of consciousness; but like a mirror, it can reflect consciousness. With the help of the light of Ātman it is able to apprehend objects. There cannot be any experience—any internal or external perception—without the light of Ātman. When a pot is placed before the eyes, the mind takes its form. Then the light of Ātman reflected in the mind manifests the pot. This mental state illumined by the light of Ātman is called *bodha* in the text. The illumined soul sees in every mental state or experience Brahman alone, which is Consciousness, Existence, and Bliss Absolute. A Vedāntic text states that when the aspirant does not identify himself with the body and when he knows the Supreme Truth, then in every state of mind he experiences communion with Brahman.

According to the Nyāya system of philosophy, consciousness is not inherent in Ātman. It is produced only when Ātman comes in contact with the mind. Free from this contact Ātman is devoid of consciousness and

luminosity. This view is in conflict with the one expressed in the Upanishads: that Ātman is Knowledge and Consciousness. According to a school of Buddhist idealists, consciousness is self-luminous but momentary; therefore it is non-eternal. This view contradicts the scriptures, which speak of Brahman as eternal and self-luminous Consciousness.

*It is indeed miserable to be born into the world a victim of ignorance and lead the life of a phenomenal being—be it a god, a man, or a sub-human creature—and experience the suffering of old age, disease, and death. Therefore a man who has attained a high state of evolution and cultivated spiritual yearning should make a special effort to realize, in this very life, the goal of Freedom.*

## 5

If a man knows Ātman here, he then attains the true goal of life. If he does not know It here, a great destruction awaits him. Having realized the Self in every being, the wise relinquish the world and become immortal.

**TRUE GOAL OF LIFE:** That is to say, the Highest Good, or Immortality. The text may also refer to longevity, worldly prosperity, and righteousness. The knower of Brahman can obtain all these cherished objects of life; but he always prefers Freedom to any worldly possession.

**IF HE DOES NOT ETC:** That is to say, in spite of all the facilities given to him for realizing Truth.

**GREAT DESTRUCTION:** A man dying in ignorance of the Self is condemned to roam in the world through an interminable chain of births and deaths. Nothing can be more pitiable than to be deprived of one's spiritual heritage on account of sloth or inadvertence.

**IN EVERY BEING:** Living and non-living. Brahman is immanent in all. It alone exists. Names and forms are falsely superimposed upon It through avidyā.

**RELINQUISH ETC:** The world characterized by the false notions of "I" and "mine" is projected by the power of ignorance.

He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman. The realization of oneness with Brahman is the teaching of the Upanishads.

*Here ends the Second Chapter  
of the Kena Upanishad.*

## CHAPTER III

**BRAHMAN, ACCORDING TO** the story, obtained a victory for the gods; and by that victory of Brahman the gods became elated. They said to themselves: "Verily, this victory is ours; verily, this glory is ours only."

**BRAHMAN:** He is the sole controller of the universe in every way, unknowable by the mind, the giver of victory to the gods, and the vanquisher of the demons.

**THE STORY:** The Upanishads often introduce a story to explain their abstruse subject matter. Sometimes the purpose of the story is to eulogize the knowledge which the Upanishads wish to impart. In this instance the story shows that the gods of fire and air attained pre-eminence among the deities on account of their understanding of Brahman; and for the same reason Indra became king of all the gods. Or the story may show how extremely hard it is to know Brahman. The gods of fire and air, and Indra, the king of the lower heavens—all endowed with supernatural powers—knew Brahman only with the utmost difficulty. Or the story may serve still another purpose, namely, to show that man's notion that he is the doer is entirely false, the truth being that he is the instrument and Brahman the doer.

**OBTAINED ETC:** In ancient times, according to the story, there was a fight between the gods and the demons, the latter being enemies of mankind and transgressors of righteousness. It was Brahman who won the victory for the gods; He gave them the fruit of victory for the preservation of the world.

**BY THAT VICTORY ETC:** The gods, because of their ignorance, did not know that all power and glory belong to Brahman, the Supreme Lord, the omniscient and omnipresent Spirit, who dwells in all hearts as the inmost Self. He is the doer and the dispenser of the fruit of action. He uses the senses, the mind, and the ego of embodied beings as instruments.

**OURS:** Fire, Wind, and the other gods are, in reality, manifestations of Brahman in the relative universe conditioned by names and forms. These embodied beings, powerless by themselves, are instruments of the Supreme Spirit. In their ignorance they forgot their inmost Self, that is to say, Brahman, and regarded the combination of the body, the senses, and the ego, endowed with a name and a form, as the ultimate victor.

*Brahman, the omniscient Spirit and the Witness, at once came to know of the false notion of the gods. He did not want them to remain deluded like the demons.*

## 2

Brahman, to be sure, understood it all and appeared before them. But they did not know who that adorable Spirit was.

UNDERSTOOD ETC: Brahman is the controller of the mind and the director of the sense-organs.

IT ALL: That is to say, the false notion of the gods.

APPEARED ETC: Assuming by His inscrutable will and yoga-power an individualized form of all-surpassing greatness, capable of being perceived by the sense-organs—a form of the Personal God.

*The gods were frightened to see this wondrous form and wanted to know who it was.*

## 3-6

They said to Agni (Fire): "O Agni! Find out who this great Spirit is." "Yes," he said, and hastened to It. Brahman asked him: "Who are you?" He replied: "I am known as Agni; I am also called Jātavedā." Brahman said: "What power is in you, who are so well known?" Fire replied: "I can burn all—whatever there is on earth." Brahman put a straw before him and said: "Burn this." He rushed toward it with all his ardour but could not burn it. Then he returned from the Spirit and said to the gods: "I could not find out who this Spirit is."

AGNI: The two principal epithets by which Fire was known among the Vedic seers were Agni and Jātavedā. He was called Agni because, according to the root meaning of the word, he was the first among the gods to obtain the offering at sacrifices. He was called Jātavedā because of his being nearly omniscient, which is one of the etymological meanings of the word.

I AM KNOWN ETC: Fire mentioned the two epithets in order to show his importance among the gods.

BURN ALL ETC: All the animate and inanimate objects on earth and in the interspace.

## 7-10

Then they said to Vāyu (Air): "O Vāyu! Find out who this great Spirit is." "Yes," he said, and hastened to It. Brahman asked him: "Who

are you?" He replied: "I am known as Vāyu; I am also called Mātariśvā." Brahman said: "What power is in you, who are so well known?" Vāyu replied: "I can carry off all—whatever there is on earth." Brahman put a straw before him and said: "Carry this." He rushed toward it with all his ardour but could not move it. Then he returned from the Spirit and said to the gods: "I could not find out who this Spirit is."

**VĀYU:** The two principal epithets of the god of air in the Vedas are Vāyu and Mātariśvā. The former is derived from a root meaning "to go" or "to carry smell." The etymological meaning of the second epithet is "to travel in space."

### 11-12

Then the gods said to Indra: "O Maghavan! Find out who this great Spirit is." "Yes," he said and hastened to It. But the Spirit disappeared from him. Then Indra beheld in that very region of the sky a Woman highly adorned. She was Umā, the daughter of the Himālayas. He approached Her and said: "Who is this great Spirit?"

**MAGHAVAN:** Indra, the king of the gods, was so called because of his great power.

**DISAPPEARED:** The Spirit did not even exchange a word with Indra. It wanted to crush completely his pride in being the king of the gods.

**IN THAT VERY REGION:** That is to say, in the very spot where the Spirit had vanished. Indra did not return to his compeers but remained there absorbed in meditation in order to know the true nature of the Spirit.

**WOMAN:** The word refers to the Knowledge of Brahman (Brahmavidyā) or the Power (Śakti) of Brahman personified as a woman.

**UMĀ:** Also known as Durgā. The daughter of King Himālaya, as Knowledge, is the inseparable consort of Śiva, or the Absolute. They always coexist, like a word and its meaning or fire and its power of burning. Brahman, as Śiva, is quiescent and beyond the perception of the senses and the mind, but as Umā, or Śakti, It is the active principle in creation and is immanent in the universe. One finds that in Vedic symbolism the power of a god is represented by his consort. For example, the power of Indra is Indrāni; the power of Brahmā is Brahmāni.

*Here ends the Third Chapter  
of the Kena Upanishad*

## CHAPTER IV

**SHE REPLIED:** "It is, indeed, Brahman. Through the victory of Brahman alone have you attained glory." After that Indra understood that It was Brahman.

**THROUGH THE VICTORY ETC:** The demons were conquered by the power of Brahman; the gods were mere instruments.

**AFTER THAT:** Indra came to know about Brahman not by his own power but through Umā, who is the Śakti, or Power, of Brahman. The drift of the text is that the true nature of Brahman is revealed by Brahman Itself, when taught by the Vedas and explained by a qualified teacher, and not otherwise.

*Indra, Vāyu, and Agni are the leaders of the gods because of their intimate knowledge of Brahman.*

### 2

Since they approached very near Brahman and were the first to know that It was Brahman, these devas, namely, Agni, Vāyu, and Indra, excelled the other gods.

**APPROACHED ETC:** These three deities came very near Brahman and conversed with It.

**DEVAS:** The literal meaning of the word deva is "shining one." It is often translated as "god."

**EXCELLED:** In regard to power, quality, and affluence.

*Agni and Vāyu were told by Indra that the Spirit was Brahman; but Indra came to know about Brahman from Umā. Therefore Indra excelled all the other gods.*

### 3

Since Indra approached Brahman nearest, and since he was the first to know that It was Brahman, Indra excelled the other gods.

This is the instruction about Brahman with regard to the gods: It is like a flash of lightning; It is like a wink of the eye.

**WITH REGARD ETC:** Brahman is often explained in the Upanishads from the point of view of the embodied individual self (microcosm) and also from the point of view of the gods (macrocosm). From the first point of view, Brahman is the true experiencer in every being. From the second, It is the World Soul, known as Virât, who, according to Vedântic mystics, is conceived of as dwelling in the solar orb, being the effulgent Lord of all the gods, who are Its parts. The microcosm, or individual self, and the macrocosm are in essence identical.

**LIKE A FLASH OF LIGHTNING:** The brilliance of lightning illumines the universe all at once. Brahman, likewise, is endowed with indescribable radiance. Or the phrase may mean that Brahman appeared before the gods like lightning and instantaneously disappeared.

**LIKE A WINK:** It takes no more time than a wink of the eye for Brahman to create, maintain, and destroy the universe. That is to say, the nature of Brahman is inscrutable in the extreme. Or the phrase may mean that the revelation of Brahman is instantaneous, like the wink of an eye. The realization of Brahman does not depend upon time. The moment ignorance disappears one obtains the Knowledge of Brahman. The concepts of time, space, and so on belong to the realm of mâyâ.

Now the instruction about Brahman with regard to the individual self: The mind, as it were, goes to Brahman. The seeker, by means of the mind, communes with It intimately again and again. This should be the volition of his mind.

**WITH REGARD ETC:** See the first note of the foregoing verse.

**THE MIND:** The mind is superimposed upon Brahman, as a mirage is superimposed upon the desert. The modifications of the mind, such as volition and memory, are in reality directed to Brahman. They seek to reveal Brahman alone.

**THE MIND, AS IT WERE, ETC:** While meditating on Brahman, the aspirant should think that his mind has attained to the luminous Brahman and is established in It.

**THIS SHOULD ETC:** The aspirant, while meditating on Brahman, should direct his volition, memory, and other modifications of the mind to Brahman alone. The idea is that Brahman manifests Itself in an individual



through the mind. The degree of this manifestation is determined by the measure of purity of the mental state.

The previous verse describes the revelation of Brahman with reference to the macrocosm by the illustration of lightning and the wink of an eye. This revelation is instantaneous and fleeting. The present statement, with reference to the microcosm, describes Brahman's manifestation as concomitant with the modifications of the mind. This also points to the instantaneous revelation of Brahman. In this way alone can the finite mind of the beginner meditate on Brahman. The attributeless and transcendent Absolute is beyond its comprehension.

*How to worship Brahman:*

6

That Brahman is called Tadvana, the Adorable of all; It should be worshipped by the name of Tadvana. All creatures desire him who worships Brahman thus.

**TADVANA:** One of the mystical epithets which the Vedic seers used in worshipping Brahman.

**ADORABLE ETC:** Because Brahman is the inmost Self of all.

**DESIRE ETC:** As they desire Brahman.

*After receiving the above instruction, the disciple addressed the preceptor.*

7

*The disciple said: "Teach me, sir, the Upanishad."*

*The preceptor replied: "I have already told you the Upanishad. I have certainly told you the Upanishad about Brahman."*

**UPANISHAD:** The word denotes here the secret and profound wisdom regarding Brahman, which one can obtain only from a qualified preceptor. (See pp. 11-12.)

What was the real intention of the disciple in asking the preceptor to narrate again the Upanishad, which had already been explained to him? Certainly he did not want the preceptor to repeat what had already been stated. The question, further, does not imply that the description of Brahman given above is incomplete and therefore should be elaborated. The purpose of the pupil is to know whether or not the Knowledge of Brahman

already described stands in need of something else, any auxiliary help in the form of ritual or study, without which the desired goal of Liberation cannot be secured. The preceptor's reply seems to convey the idea that the Knowledge of Brahman does not stand in need of any such help. It is totally independent of any action, sacrificial or otherwise, because such an action cannot be performed without the notion of a doer, an instrument, and a result. What has been described before as the Upanishad is alone sufficient for the attainment of Immortality.

*The Knowledge of the Self, described in the Upanishads, is eternal and self-luminous, but it remains veiled by avidyā, or ignorance. On the destruction of ignorance the revelation of the Self immediately takes place. The means by which ignorance can be destroyed are described:*

## 8

Austerities, self-restraint, and sacrificial rites are Its feet, and the Vedas are all Its limbs. Truth is Its abode.

**AUSTERITIES:** Control of the body, the mind, and the senses.

**SELF-RESTRAINT:** Control of the passions.

**SACRIFICIAL RITES:** These refer to the daily obligatory devotions to be performed by a householder. Karma, the word in the text, denotes all the religious activities practised daily by pious souls.

**FEET:** The virtues mentioned in this verse also include such others as humility, non-violence, and forbearance, as mentioned in the Bhagavad Gitā (XIII. 7-11). They are the means for the attainment of the Knowledge of Brahman; that is to say, when the seeker practises these virtues, his heart becomes pure, and Truth is revealed in the pure heart. It is a well-known fact that the Knowledge of Brahman, when explained to an impure man, is either misunderstood or not understood at all. This is well explained in the story of Indra and Virochana, in the *Chhândogya Upanishad* (VIII. vii. 1). Therefore the Knowledge of Brahman is attained by him alone who has purified his mind by the practice of austerities, self-control, and other spiritual disciplines either in this birth or in a previous one. The Vedas state: "The profound secrets explained here reveal their true meaning only to those who have cultivated supreme devotion to the Lord and also to their spiritual preceptors." The Smṛiti also states: "One attains Knowledge only after the annihilation of sinful deeds." But it should be remembered that austerities and other disciplines are only indirect means to Knowledge, which in reality cannot coexist with any form of action. The disciplines are compared to the feet on which a man stands.

The Knowledge of Brahman can rest only on the solid foundation created by spiritual disciplines.

**VEDAS:** That is to say, the four Vedas and their six auxiliary members. The latter comprise the science of proper articulation and pronunciation (*śikṣā*), the science of prosody (*chhandas*), grammar (*vyākaranam*), etymological explanation of difficult Vedic words (*nirukta*), astronomy (*jyotis*), and ritual (*kalpa*). They help in the correct pronunciation and interpretation of the text and the right use of the mantras in the rituals; therefore they are called the protectors of the Vedic wisdom.

**TRUTH:** That is to say, freedom from deceit; it also means integrity in word, thought, and deed. The Knowledge of Brahman is attained by those alone who are honest, good-natured, and righteous and not by people of perverse nature. The word truth is particularly mentioned in the text because it is the special discipline for the Knowledge of Brahman. The *Smṛiti* states: "If a thousand Horse-sacrifices (*Āśvamedhas*) and truth are placed in the two pans of a scales, the latter will outweigh the former."

*The result of the knowledge embodied in the Kena Upanishad:*

9

He who thus knows this Upanishad shakes off all sins and becomes firmly established in the infinite and the highest Heaven, yea, the highest Heaven.

**SHAKES OFF ETC:** That is to say, the seed of life in the relative world characterized by ignorance, desire, and action.

**HEAVEN:** This word, according to Śāṅkarāchārya, denotes Brahman, or the Absolute, and not any celestial abode. He mentions as his reason the two qualifying words infinite and highest. A celestial plane is neither infinite nor the highest. The drift of this verse is that the knower of Brahman, having realized the light, does not come back to the world of darkness.

The repetition at the end denotes the completion of the Upanishad.

*Here ends the Fourth Chapter  
of the Kena Upanishad.*

*Here ends the Kena Upanishad.*

## THE PEACE CHANT

**Om. May Brahman protect us both (the preceptor and the disciple)! May Brahman bestow upon us both the fruit of Knowledge! May we both obtain the energy to acquire Knowledge! May what we both study reveal the Truth! May we cherish no ill feeling toward each other!**

**Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!**

**Om. May the different parts of my body, my tongue, prāna, eyes, ears, and my strength, and also all the other sense-organs, be nourished! All, indeed, is Brahman, as is declared in the Upanishads. May I never deny Brahman! May Brahman never deny me! May there never be denial on the part of Brahman! May there never be denial on my part! May all the virtues described in the Upanishads belong to me, who am devoted to Brahman! Yea, may they all belong to me!**

**Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!**

# MUNDAKA UPANISHAD

## INTRODUCTION

**THE MUNDAKA UPANISHAD** belongs to the Atharva-Veda. It is also called a Mantra Upanishad because it is written in verse. But it is not, like the Mantra section of the Vedas, intended to be used in the sacrifices or rituals. The *Mundaka Upanishad* teaches the Knowledge of Brahman.

The word mundaka is derived from a root that signifies shaving. The instruction given in this Upanishad has the sharpness of a razor; it cuts off a man's error and ignorance, like a razor. The name also suggests that this Upanishad is meant only for the shaven-headed sannyāsins, who renounce all the actions prescribed for householders and devote themselves to the cultivation of Brahnavidyā, or the Knowledge of Brahman.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* and the *Praśna Upanishad*, both belonging to the Atharva-Veda, are said to be complementary. What is briefly stated in the one is elaborated in the other.

The importance of the *Mundaka Upanishad* can be recognized from the fact that this is the only Upanishad of the Atharva-Veda which contains a verse (I. i. 6.) directly used by Bādarāyana Vyāsa in constructing an aphorism (I. ii. 11.) of the *Vedānta Sūtras*, the most authoritative book on the Vedānta philosophy.

Like some other Upanishads, the *Mundaka Upanishad* gives its instruction in the form of a dialogue between a disciple and his preceptor. The disciple, Śaunaka, fully qualified for Brahnavidyā, asks Angiras, the teacher: "Revered sir, what is that by the knowing of which all this becomes known?" Here one sees the passion of the ancient Hindus for knowledge. The teacher replies that there are two kinds of knowledge, and a seeker should acquire them both. They are called the lower knowledge and the Higher Knowledge. The lower knowledge includes the teachings of all the Vedas (the sections dealing with rituals and sacrifices) and their auxiliaries; it endows a man with

knowledge of the manifested universe and enables him to enjoy material prosperity on earth and happiness in heaven. By means of the Higher Knowledge one realizes the Imperishable Truth. Brahman, the goal of the Higher Knowledge, is the ultimate cause of the universe and all beings. It may be noted here that the Vedic philosophers did not discourage secular knowledge or worldly happiness; on the contrary, they held that unless, through experience, one had learnt their unsubstantiality, one did not acquire the necessary mood for the cultivation of the Higher Knowledge. It is for this reason that a spiritual culture and material prosperity flourished side by side in ancient India.

The second chapter of the first Mundaka deals with rituals which, when rightly carried out, enable their performers to go to heaven after death. But it is also pointed out that after the fruit has been enjoyed they return to earth. One can never expect to cross the ocean of birth and death by the "frail bark" of sacrifices. Even life in Brahmaloka, which some fortunate souls may attain through worship of Saguna Brahman, does not constitute true Immortality. That exalted celestial plane also belongs to the realm of relativity and is subject to destruction. Neither by sacrifice nor by worship of the Deity can one transcend relativity. The aspirant for Immortality must therefore turn away from both, renounce the world, repair to a qualified teacher, and obtain the Knowledge of Brahman, by means of which, alone, can he conquer time, space, and death.

The second Mundaka describes Brahman in sublime poetry as the source of all things. It gives a spiritual interpretation of creation, the universe, man, nature, and action. As a discipline for attaining the Knowledge of Brahman, meditation on Om, the symbol of the Supreme Wisdom, is prescribed. The result of such meditation is complete illumination of the mind through the destruction of all doubt and ignorance.

The third Mundaka states that the individual soul is separated from Brahman through ignorance. Its suffering is the result of the erroneous idea that it is entirely helpless and dependent on matter. Through the knowledge of its oneness with Brahman it rediscovers its innate greatness and overcomes grief. The discipline for the unitive knowledge is the practice of truthfulness, chastity of body and mind, and concentration. This knowledge cannot be attained through mere study of the scriptures or through intellect, nor by one who is weak, slothful, or

attached to worldly values. The knower of Brahman becomes Brahman. The Upanishad concludes with a repetition of the warning that the Knowledge of Brahman must not be pursued by one who has not already observed the various religious duties prescribed for the purification of the mind and who has not practised concentration.

S. N.



## ŚRĪ ŚĀNKARĀCHĀRYA'S INTRODUCTION

*Om. Salutations to Brahman!*

THE MUNDAKA UPANISHAD,<sup>1</sup> beginning with the text: "Om. *Brahmā, the Maker of the universe,*" belongs to the Atharva-Veda.<sup>2</sup>

The Upanishad, for the purpose of extolling its content, states at the very outset how the Knowledge contained therein was transmitted by preceptor to disciple. The great sages made mighty efforts to obtain this Knowledge; for it is the means of realizing the Highest Good in life. The Upanishad praises the Knowledge in order to create a taste for it in the mind of the hearer; for after the taste is created by the praise, he will eagerly seek it.

The relationship between the Knowledge<sup>3</sup> and Liberation, as means to end, will be subsequently stated in the passage beginning: "The fetters of the heart are broken." (II. ii. 8.)

The Upanishad first states that the knowledge denoted by the term lower knowledge (*aparā vidyā*), discussed in the Rig-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, and the rest, and consisting of merely mandatory and prohibitory injunctions, cannot destroy ignorance (*avidyā*), which is the cause of *samsāra*, or relative existence.<sup>4</sup> Next it distinguishes the Higher Knowl-

<sup>1</sup> The word *mundaka* means, literally, one with a shaven head, that is to say, a *sannyāsin*, or monk. In obedience to Vedic injunctions, a *sannyāsin* is required to shave his head in order to denote his complete renunciation of the ritualistic activities obligatory for a householder. The tuft of hair which householders belonging to the three higher castes wear is required in the Vedic rites. The *Mundaka Upanishad* exhorts the practice of complete renunciation and is therefore particularly suited to a *sannyāsin*.

<sup>2</sup> The Atharva-Veda contains twenty-eight Upanishads. Of these Śāṅkarāchārya has written commentaries on the *Praśna* and the *Mundaka*, which are similar in nature.

<sup>3</sup> The Upanishad.

<sup>4</sup> The infinite and immortal Brahman appears as the finite universe and the mortal *jiva* on account of ignorance, or *avidyā*. Following the scriptural injunction, the embodied soul refrains from certain activities and engages in others, for the purpose of enjoying happiness here and hereafter. The knowl-

edge (*Parā Vidyā*)<sup>5</sup> from the lower knowledge, in the passage beginning: "Fools, dwelling in darkness." (I. ii. 8.) Ultimately the Upanishad, in the passage beginning: "After having examined all these worlds which are gained by works" (I. ii. 12.), describes the Knowledge of Brahman, which is the means to the attainment of the Absolute and which can be obtained, by the grace of the preceptor,<sup>6</sup> only after the aspirant has cultivated dispassion for all things considered as ends of worldly pursuit and as means to the realization of such ends. The result of this Knowledge<sup>7</sup> is repeatedly stated by the Upanishad in such passages as: "He who knows the Supreme Brahman verily becomes Brahman" (III. ii. 9.) and "Enjoy here supreme Immortality." (III. ii. 6.)

Although people belonging to all stages of life (*āśramas*)<sup>8</sup> are equally entitled to the Knowledge of Brahman, yet the knowledge culminating in complete renunciation (*sannyāsa*) becomes the means to Liberation (*Moksha*), and not the knowledge combined with action. This is shown by such passages as: "Who live in the forests on alms" (I. ii. 11.) and "Having purified their minds through the practice of *sannyāsa*," (III. ii. 6.) The Knowledge of Brahman is incompatible with action. One realizing the identity of *Ātman* and Brahman cannot perform action even in a dream. Knowledge is independent of the time factor; it is not the effect of any definite cause. Therefore it is not reasonable to consider the Knowledge of Brahman to be conditioned by time.<sup>9</sup>

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edge that guides the individual soul in its worldly activities is called the lower knowledge. It is quite compatible with life in the relative world; but it does not enable one to destroy ignorance and attain Immortality. Through illusion one walking in the moonlight takes an oyster-shell to be a piece of silver. This illusion can be got rid of only by true knowledge of the shell, and not by any other means.

<sup>5</sup> The Knowledge of Brahman is called the Higher Knowledge because it is the means to realization of the Highest Good. The knowledge of rituals and sacrifices is called the lower knowledge because it is the means to enjoyment of transitory happiness in the relative world.

<sup>6</sup> According to the Vedic pronouncement, independent study of the scriptures, unaided by a teacher, does not bring the desired result of Liberation.

<sup>7</sup> The fruit of the Knowledge of Brahman is the utter annihilation of suffering and the realization of immeasurable bliss.

<sup>8</sup> See p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> When Śankara speaks of the incompatibility of work and the Knowledge of Brahman, he generally means by the former the rituals and ceremonies prescribed by the Vedas for the attainment of a definite result, namely, happiness here and hereafter. Work also includes philanthropic activities and all duties in general which are associated with the ideas of a doer, an instrument,

*If it be suggested that Knowledge and action are compatible, as indicated by the fact that the teachers among the householders handed down the Knowledge of Brahman to their disciples, it can be said in reply that this mere indication cannot override a well established truth. The coexistence of darkness and light cannot be made possible even by a hundred rules—much less by mere indications.*

*After thus describing the desired end and the result of the study of the Upanishad, we now proceed to write a short commentary on it.*

*The Knowledge of Brahman (Brahmavidyā) is called Upanishad because it destroys the whole host of evils, such as lying in a mother's womb, birth, old age, and disease, for those who approach it intimately and with reverence and devotion; or because it enables them to attain the Supreme Brahman; or because it utterly shatters such things as ignorance and desires, which are the cause of samsāra, or embodied existence. For such is the etymological meaning of the word Upanishad.*

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and a result. The time factor is very important in the performance of Vedic actions. Work bears fruit in the course of time. But the Knowledge of Brahman transcends time, space, and the causal law. It is not the result of any action. This Eternal Knowledge is veiled by ignorance and reveals itself when the ignorance is removed.

## INVOCATION

**Om. May we, O gods, hear with our ears what is auspicious! May we, O worshipful gods, see with our eyes what is good! May we, strong in limbs and body, sing your praise and enjoy the life allotted to us by Prajāpati! Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!**

# FIRST MUNDAKA

## CHAPTER I

OM. BRAHMĀ, the Maker of the universe and the Preserver of the world, was the first among the devas. He told His eldest son Atharva about the Knowledge of Brahman, the foundation of all knowledge.

BRAHMĀ: The first manifestation of the unconditioned Brahman in time and space. He is also known as the World Soul, the sum total of all souls and minds. Brahṁā is endowed with unique knowledge, renunciation, powers, and righteousness. (See pp. 68-69.)

FIRST: On account of His uncommon virtues, Brahṁā is pre-eminent among the gods; or He is the first among them to be created.

ELDEST SON: At the beginning of a particular cycle Brahṁā first created the sage Atharva.

FOUNDATION ETC: Because all forms of knowledge rest upon the Knowledge of Brahman. The objects of all knowledge are known through the Knowledge of Brahman. Compare: "Have you ever asked for that instruction by which we hear what cannot be heard, by which we perceive what cannot be perceived, by which we know what cannot be known?" (*Chh. Up.* VI. i. 3.)

By praising Brahṁā and the Knowledge of Brahman, the Upanishad indirectly extols the Knowledge which it intends to impart. The purpose is to awaken the interest of the hearer.

*The Knowledge of Brahman was taught in ancient India through a succession of teachers, from teacher to disciple or from father to son.*

### 2

The Knowledge of Brahman about which Brahṁā told Atharva, Atharva, in olden times, told Angir. Angir taught it to Satyavaha, belonging to the clan of Bharadvāja, and the latter taught it, in succession, to Angiras.

ANGIR: Either a son or a disciple of Satyavaha.

IN SUCCESSION: Parāvaram, the word in the text, may also mean the

Higher Knowledge and the lower knowledge, and be used as an adjective modifying Knowledge of Brahman.

The Knowledge of Brahman was first revealed by the Lord to Brahmā, who transmitted it to His eldest son. Therefore this Knowledge is not of human origin and is free from human imperfections.

## 3

Śaunaka, the great householder, approached Angiras in the proper manner and said: Revered sir, what is that by the knowing of which all this becomes known?

**IN THE PROPER MANNER:** That is to say, according to scriptural injunction. A seeker endowed with the requisite spiritual disciplines (see pp. 12 and 114) should approach, fuel in hand, a qualified preceptor. The carrying of fuel denotes the pupil's humility and his desire to serve the teacher in every way.

**WHAT IS THAT ETC:** Śaunaka may have heard the saying of some holy men that there was something by the knowing of which all is known. Or he may have been impelled to ask the question by reasoning that, as the various articles made of gold can be known through the knowledge of gold, so likewise, there should be one cause of the multiple objects of the world, by the knowing of which its effects could be known.

**ALL THIS:** All the sense-perceived objects of the world.

According to Non-dualistic Vedānta an effect has no real existence apart from its cause. Therefore when a man knows the cause, he also should know that the effect has no reality independent of it. Brahman is the ultimate cause of the universe. When one knows Brahman, one also knows that the universe has no reality independent of Brahman.

*Angiras answered Śaunaka:*

## 4

To him he said: Two kinds of knowledge must be known—that is what the knowers of Brahman tell us. They are the Higher Knowledge and the lower knowledge.

**KNOWERS OF BRAHMAN:** Those who have mastered the true significance of the Vedas and realized Ultimate Truth.

**HIGHER:** The Knowledge of the Supreme Self, which is beyond duality.

**LOWER:** The knowledge of righteous actions (dharma) and unrighteous actions (adharma) and their results.

The lower knowledge is the knowledge of the phenomenal world. In reality it is ignorance, for it does not lead to the Highest Good. The seer of the Upanishad asks the aspirant to acquire both the knowledge of the relative world and the Knowledge of Ultimate Reality. When by the pursuit of the former he fails to attain true freedom and immortality, he cultivates the latter.

*The two kinds of knowledge:*

5

Of these two, the lower knowledge is the Rig-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, the Sāma-Veda, the Atharva-Veda, śikshā (phonetics), kalpa (rituals), vyākaranam (grammar), nirukta (etymology), chhandas (metre), and jyotis (astronomy); and the Higher Knowledge is that by which the Imperishable Brahman is attained.

**RIG-VEDA ETC:** It may be contended that if the Higher Knowledge lies outside the Vedas, it cannot really be called by that name nor can it lead to the attainment of the Highest Good. Any knowledge that is outside the Vedas is futile and unacceptable. And what about the Upanishads, which claim to contain the Higher Knowledge? Are they, too, outside the Vedas? In that case they lose their authority. Śankarāchārya refutes these contentions by saying that the Higher Knowledge refers to the actual realization of the subject matter taught in the Śruti. It primarily means the experience of the Imperishable Brahman taught in the Upanishads, and not the mere words contained in them. The Vedas generally—and especially in this context—signify the mere assemblage of words (śabdarāśi) constituting their texts. In order to attain the Higher Knowledge, a student who has mastered the words of the scriptures must go to a qualified preceptor and cultivate such spiritual disciplines as discrimination and renunciation. Otherwise he cannot realize the Imperishable Brahman.

**ŚIKSHĀ ETC:** These six, known as the Vedāṅgas, are ancillary to the Vedas. Without knowledge of them a proper understanding of the Vedas is impossible.

**IS ATTAINED:** In the case of the Highest Truth, attainment and knowledge are identical. This attainment is the same as the destruction of ignorance. The knower of Brahman becomes Brahman.

*The nature of the Imperishable Reality is described in order to explain the Higher Knowledge:*

## 6

By means of the Higher Knowledge the wise behold everywhere Brahman, which otherwise cannot be seen or seized, which has no root or attributes, no eyes or ears, no hands or feet; which is eternal and omnipresent, all-pervading and extremely subtle; which is imperishable and the source of all beings.

**THE WISE:** Those capable of discriminating between the Real and the unreal.

**BEHOLD EVERYWHERE:** As the Ātman of all.

**SEEN:** Experienced by the organs of perception.

**SEIZED:** By the organs of action.

**NO ROOT:** Being causeless, Brahman is unrelated to any cause or effect.

**ATTRIBUTES:** Such as thickness, shortness, or blackness, by means of which an object is specified.

**OMNIPRESENT:** It manifests Itself through all beings, from the highest god to the blade of grass.

**ALL-PERVADING:** Like ākāśa, It permeates all objects.

**EXTREMELY SUBTLE:** Because Brahman transcends even ākāśa, which is the most subtle element.

**IMPERISHABLE:** Undecaying. Decay is possible for a material entity by the loss of limbs or parts or attributes. Brahman is without parts or attributes.

The wise pursue the Higher Knowledge to realize Brahman, the Imperishable Absolute. The first half of the verse describes Brahman by the negation of attributes. The second half indicates Brahman by certain positive epithets. Brahman is the attributeless and unchanging Reality in all objects, but is unrelated to them.

*Some familiar illustrations are given to explain Brahman as the source of all beings:*

## 7

As the spider sends forth and draws in its thread, as plants grow on the earth, as hair grows on the head and the body of a living man—so does everything in the universe arise from the Imperishable.

**SPIDER ETC:** It produces the thread without the help of any other cause. Further, the thread is not essentially different from the spider's body.

**DRAWS IN:** That is to say, absorbs within itself. The thread, when drawn in, becomes again part and parcel of the spider.



**PLANTS ETC:** They are not different from the earth.

**HAIR ETC:** The hair is different from the man. The one is inert and the other living.

These three illustrations stress the spontaneous nature of the creation. Brahman Itself, without the help of an extraneous cause, projects the universe out of Itself. It is both the material and the efficient cause. The first illustration points out that the universe is projected from Brahman and also ultimately merges in Brahman. The second illustration points out that, after the creation, the universe rests in Brahman. According to the third, Brahman, which is Pure Intelligence, projects out of Itself the inert material universe, like the growth of hair from a living man. The creation is not the becoming or transformation of Brahman. Brahman, through Its own inscrutable power, appears as the universe of name and form without Itself undergoing any change whatsoever. This is called *māyā*.

*The successive stages in the evolution of the universe are described. Things did not come into existence all at once, as if someone had thrown a handful of plums.*

## 8

Brahman expands by means of austerity, and from It primal matter is produced; from matter, *Prāna*; from *Prāna*, mind; from mind, the elements; from the elements, the worlds; thence works, and from the works, their immortal fruits.

**EXPANDS ETC:** The word *tapas* in the text means, literally, austerity. It also denotes intense thinking, which precedes any creative act. Here the word means knowledge regarding the future creation. Brahman, or Pure Intelligence, alone exists; It is one and without a second. Under the influence of Its own *māyā* there arises in Brahman the desire for creation, or projection, and forthwith It becomes endowed with omniscience, that is to say, with the knowledge and capacity of creating, preserving, and destroying the universe. Thus Brahman appears to increase in size, like a seed before it splits and the sprout comes out; or like a father dilating with joy before begetting a son. In this stage Brahman, or the attributeless Absolute, becomes known as *Saguna Brahman*, or Brahman associated with the attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and so on. The whole creation is the illusory superimposition of name and form on Brahman, owing to *māyā*. *Māyā* has no existence independent of Brahman.

**FROM IT ETC:** *Prakriti*, or primal matter in a state of non-differentiation, being a beginningless entity, cannot be said to be created. What is meant

is that it becomes ready for manifestation. The word for primal matter in the text is *annam*, food; all created beings derive enjoyment from material objects, as a man does from food. Brahman desirous of creation appears as the undifferentiated *prakriti*, or matter. From the standpoint of *prakriti*, Brahman is the material cause of the universe, whereas, from the standpoint of Pure Intelligence, It is the efficient cause.

**FROM MATTER, PRĀNA:** The first tangible and specific manifestation is *Prāna* (Life), known also as *Brahmā*, *Hiranyagarbha* (the Golden Egg), *Prajāpati* (the Creator), and *Sutrātmā* (the Ātman which, like a thread, holds together the whole universe). He is the World Soul, the Cosmic Person in whom become manifest the knowledge and power of Brahman with regard to creation. He is the sprout, the first shoot of the creation, and contains in seed form the desires and actions of the created beings yet to be evolved. The Personal Gods of the different religions represent different aspects of *Brahmā*. In the *Purāṇas* He is described as a special Person endowed with a form and dwelling in a special world called *Brahmaloka*, which may be roughly compared to the heaven of the Dualistic religions.

**MIND:** That is to say, the Cosmic Mind. The individual minds are not yet evolved. Mind is characterized by volition, deliberation, doubt, and determination.

**ELEMENTS:** The five elements: *ākāśa*, air, fire, water, and earth. When first evolved they are uncompounded, subtle, and incapable of creating. Then they combine and become gross elements. Each gross element contains one half portion of its subtle counterpart and one eighth of each of the four other subtle elements.

**WORLDS:** The fourteen worlds which constitute the relative universe.

**WORKS:** Performed by living beings according to their caste and order of life.

**IMMORTAL FRUITS:** Work (*karma*) creates desire, and the desire again impels one to action. Thus in the relative universe the stream of work never comes to an end even in a million aeons. The Knowledge of Brahman alone puts a stop to desire and work. Like work, its fruit is also without an end. Hence it is called immortal.

From the relative point of view, creation is without beginning. The human mind cannot think of the beginning of time or space. If a limit is arbitrarily set, one can conceive of time or space beyond that as well. Likewise, there is no such thing as absolute destruction. *Vedānta* speaks of the manifestation and the non-manifestation of the universe. In the former state things are seen in their tangible form, and in the latter they remain as seeds. These two states are called the "day of *Brahmā*" and the "night of *Brahmā*." The period of manifestation is called a *kalpa*, or cycle. Whenever the creation of the world is spoken of, what is really

meant is the beginning of a cycle. A new cycle begins by the will of Ívara (Saguna Brahman), and its character is determined by the accumulated actions of the living beings of the previous cycle. Mere matter, without the help of consciousness or intelligence, cannot precipitate creation. Whether the created beings in a particular cycle will be happy or unhappy, wise or ignorant, is determined by the law of karma. In discussing creation, or evolution, it should be remembered that according to Vedānta it is the illusory superimposition upon Brahman of names and forms. That is to say, owing to māyā Pure Intelligence, or Brahman, appears as Brahman with attributes. Then Brahman, which appeared as Brahman with attributes, further appears through māyā as the undifferentiated prakṛiti. This process of illusory superimposition is to be applied to all stages of evolution.

*The topic under discussion is concluded:*

9

For him who knows all and understands everything, whose austerity consists of knowledge—from Him, the Imperishable Brahman, are born Brahmā, name, form, and food.

**WHO KNOWS ALL:** That is to say, in general. This refers to the cosmic aspect of Brahman (Brahman with attributes) associated with māyā, or cosmic ignorance. Saguna Brahman surveys the created universe as a totality.

**UNDERSTANDS EVERYTHING:** That is to say, in particular. This refers to the individualized aspect of Brahman (that is to say, the jiva), associated with avidyā, or individualized ignorance.

**AUSTERITY:** The word refers to omniscience, endowed with which Brahman creates the universe. In the case of ordinary people austerity is associated with great effort. But Brahman creates the universe without the slightest effort. It appears to be the spontaneous manifestation of Brahman.

**NAME:** By which a created being is known.

**FORM:** Denoting a particular colour or shape.

**FOOD:** Corn, barley, and other foods, by which living beings are sustained.

It is well known that any creative work is preceded by deep thinking. The object is at first conceived in the mind of the creator; then it is given a tangible form. The universe is the outcome of the thought of the Creator. In describing the act of creation the Upanishad says: "He thought." The difference, however, between a human creation and the divine creation is that the former is the result of much effort and labour,

whereas the latter is the spontaneous manifestation of Brahman. *Devasya esha svabhavah*—"All this is the very nature of Brahman." The Upanishad gives a spiritual interpretation of the creation as opposed to a mechanistic.

*Here ends the First Chapter  
of the First Mundaka.*

## CHAPTER II

**THIS IS THE TRUTH:** The sacrificial works which were revealed to the rishis in the hymns have been described in many ways in the three Vedas. Practise them, being desirous to attain their true results. This is your path leading to the fruits of your works.

**SACRIFICIAL WORKS:** The various sacrifices described in the Vedas, which enable their performers to attain prosperity here on earth and joy in the afterworld.

**WERE REVEALED ETC:** The hymns of the Vedas describe sacrifices which are to be performed by men seeking certain results.

**RISHIS:** The wise seers to whom the Vedic truths were revealed.

**THREE VEDAS:** That is to say, the Rig-Veda, the Sāma-Veda, and the Yajur-Veda. The three priests, known as the hotā, the udgātā, and the adhvvarju, expert in the three Vedas mentioned above, participate in the Vedic sacrifices, though a brāhmin who has specialized in the Atharva-Veda is also present. The Atharva-Veda does not contain injunctions for the sacrifices. (See p. 3 ff.) Or the words may refer to the world period known as Treta, which is the age of sacrifice. The Hindu scriptures speak of four world periods: Satya, Treta, Dvāpara, and Kali. In each succeeding age the virtue diminishes and sinfulness increases.

**TRUE RESULTS:** Each sacrifice, when rightly performed, produces a definite result.

**THIS IS ETC:** The Vedic sacrifices, when rightly performed, bring to the sacrificer sure results.

In the previous chapter the lower knowledge and the Higher Knowledge have been described. The result of the lower knowledge is life in samsāra, the relative world; and the result of the Higher Knowledge is Moksha, or Liberation. Samsāra is characterized by a multiplicity of actions, instruments, and their results. Without beginning or end, it moves with uninterrupted continuity, like the current of a stream. Those who are identified with it are miserable. Moksha, on the other hand, consists in the cessation of samsāra; it is free from birth, growth, decay, and death. It is the experience of fearlessness, purity, and blessedness and is characterized by the realization of the Self, supreme joy, and non-duality. The second chapter begins

with a description of the lower knowledge, dealing with sacrifices and other meritorious deeds. It will be shown that their results are ephemeral. Only when a man understands this does he desire to cultivate the Higher Knowledge, which leads to Liberation.

*The Agnihotra sacrifice is mentioned first. It precedes all other sacrifices.*

## 2

When the fire is well lighted and the flames flicker, let a man offer his oblations in the space between the two portions of melted butter.

When the sacrifice mentioned in this verse is properly performed, the sacrificer reaps a good result.

*But there are many impediments in the way of properly performing the Agnihotra sacrifice. If it is not rightly performed much harm befalls the sacrificer.*

## 3

If a man's Agnihotra sacrifice is not accompanied by the Darśa and the Purnamāsa sacrifice, by the Four Months' sacrifice and the Autumnal sacrifice; if it is unattended by hospitality to guests or if the oblations are not offered at the right time; or if the sacrifice is unaccompanied by the Vaiśvadeva ceremony or is improperly performed—then it destroys his seven worlds.

**DARŚA ETC:** The different sacrifices mentioned in this verse are supplementary to the Agnihotra sacrifice.

**HOSPITALITY ETC:** The householder who performs the Agnihotra sacrifice must entertain guests daily.

**SEVEN WORLDS:** The earth and the six planes above it. Or the words may denote the great-grandfather, grandfather, and father of the sacrificer, the sacrificer himself, and also his son, grandson, and great-grandson.

If the Agnihotra sacrifice is not supplemented by other sacrifices or is not properly performed, it does not enable its performer to attain any of the worlds. Or his three ancestors and three descendants do not confer any benefit on his soul. All his efforts and labour are in vain.

*The flames of the sacrificial fire:*

Kāli, Karāli, Manojavā, Sulohitā, Sudhumravarnā, Sphulingini, and the luminous Viśvaruchi—these seven, flickering about, form the seven tongues of the fire.

KĀLI: Lit., black.

KARĀLI: Terrific.

MANOJAVĀ: Swift as thought.

SULOHitĀ: Very red.

SUDHUMRAVARNĀ: Of the colour of bright smoke; purple.

SPHULINGINI: Scintillating.

VIŚVARUCHI: All-gleaming, all-formed.

The seven tongues of the fire are intended to swallow the oblations thrown into it. The names of the flames are very suggestive.

*The result of the sacrifice:*

A man who performs the sacrifices when these flames are shining, and offers oblations at the right time, is carried by these oblations on the rays of the sun to where dwells the sole sovereign of the gods.

SACRIFICES: The Agnihotra and its supplementary sacrifices (I. ii. 2-3).

AT THE RIGHT TIME: The proper time prescribed in the Vedas for each sacrifice.

CARRIED: That is to say, after death.

RAYS OF THE SUN: The oblations are turned into the sun's rays. The rays symbolize the virtues accruing to the sacrificer from the performance of the sacrifice.

SOLE SOVEREIGN: That is to say, Indra.

*How the sacrificer is led to heaven is poetically described by the Upanishad.*

The luminous oblations say to the sacrificer: Come hither! Come hither! and lead him on the rays of the sun, worshipping him all the while and greeting him with the pleasant words: This is the holy heaven of Brahmā, earned by your good deeds.

**OBLATIONS:** That is to say, the merits acquired through the offering of oblations.

The reward for the sacrifices and ritualistic worship is the attainment of svarga, or heaven. This heaven does not mean Brahmaloaka, which is attained through other spiritual disciplines.

*The highest reward for the sacrificial worship performed by men devoid of knowledge has been described above. Such worship is the result of avidyā, or lack of true knowledge, and a longing for material happiness. It is of no consequence, because it cannot liberate the sacrificer from inevitable decay and death. It brings him back to earth and hence ends in misery. Therefore it is condemned.*

## 7

But frail indeed are those rafts of sacrifices, conducted by eighteen persons, upon whom rests the inferior work; therefore they are destructible. Fools who rejoice in them as the Highest Good fall victims again and again to old age and death.

**EIGHTEEN PERSONS:** Sixteen priests, the sacrificer, and his wife.

**UPON WHOM RESTS ETC:** Eighteen persons are indispensable for the performance of the Agnihotra sacrifice.

**INFERIOR WORK:** Refers to the sacrifices performed without knowledge of, or meditation on, the deities.

**THEREFORE ETC:** It is because the eighteen persons who conduct the sacrifice are themselves liable to destruction. "As curds or milk kept in a pot are destroyed when the pot is destroyed, so also the results of the sacrifices come to an end because the eighteen persons who perform them are mortal." (*Śaṅkarāchārya*.) The effect is determined by the cause. A permanent result cannot be produced by an impermanent cause.

**FALL VICTIMS ETC:** When the result of the sacrifice is exhausted through enjoyment in heaven, the sacrificer comes back to earth, is born as an embodied being, and experiences old age and death.

What is true of the sacrifice is true also of worship and action. They are performed through instruments which have a beginning and an end and so are impermanent. Therefore no work or worship can produce Immortality, or the Highest Good.

*Avidyā and its offshoots, desire and action, are condemned:*



## 8

Fools, dwelling in darkness, but wise in their own conceit and puffed up with vain scholarship, wander about, being afflicted by many ills, like blind men led by the blind.

**WANDER ABOUT ETC:** As a result of their past actions they assume the bodies of men or lower creatures.

**MANY ILLS:** Such as old age, illness, and death.

**LIKE BLIND MEN ETC:** These unfortunate souls meet with a dire fate.

They who devote themselves to ritualistic worship and seek thereby ephemeral results cannot attain Liberation.

*Furthermore:*

## 9

Children, immersed in ignorance in various ways, flatter themselves, saying: We have accomplished life's purpose. Because these performers of karma do not know the Truth owing to their attachment, they fall from heaven, misery-stricken, when the fruit of their work is exhausted.

**CHILDREN:** The ignorant, whose minds are undeveloped, like those of children.

**FLATTER THEMSELVES ETC:** Because they enjoy material happiness on earth and are assured of pleasures in heaven.

**TRUTH:** The Knowledge of Brahman, which excludes all rituals and actions.

**ATTACHMENT:** To the fruit of action.

The Upanishad points out that ritualistic worship is inadequate for the attainment of Liberation. It admits that heaven is the reward of sacrificial worship but also points out that the happiness enjoyed therein is impermanent. This happiness cannot be the ultimate goal of human endeavour.

*The result of meritorious action performed with a selfish motive is the attainment of heaven. But heavenly happiness is transitory.*

## 10

Ignorant fools, regarding sacrifices and humanitarian works as the highest, do not know any higher good. Having enjoyed their reward on

the heights of heaven, gained by good works, they enter again this world or a lower one.

**IGNORANT FOOLS:** Those who, through delusion, are attached to family, friends, or material possessions.

**HUMANITARIAN WORKS:** Works of charity such as digging ponds, sinking wells, building roads, and establishing almshouses, as enjoined in the Smṛiti.

**THE HIGHEST:** The most effective means of attaining what they consider to be life's goal.

**HIGHER GOOD:** That is to say, the means leading to true Blessedness. It is Self-Knowledge.

**LOWER ONE:** That is to say, a subhuman plane.

Generally speaking, a man's actions can be divided under three heads: good, bad, and mixed. If good action prevails, he obtains a god's body and dwells in heaven; if bad action prevails, he obtains an animal's or a still lower body; and if he performs mixed action, he is born in a human body. He reaps the result of his action in one of these bodies. From heaven or from a subhuman plane he again returns to earth as a human being and takes up the thread of his higher evolution.

The inadequacy of sacrificial worship to obtain Liberation has already been pointed out. Philanthropic works are in the same category. They are generally undertaken to acquire fame or power, soothe a guilty conscience, or kill the boredom of life. The performer of such actions believes in the diversity of the relative world. Any work based upon diversity cannot lead to the Highest Good. True and unselfish service to others can be rendered only by those who have realized the unity of existence.

*According to the Hindu scriptures there exist six planes above the earth (Bhuh). They are known as Bhuvah, Svah, Mahah, Janah, Tapah, and Satya. Bhuvah (interspace) is the intermediary world between the earth and Svah, or heaven. Janah, Tapah, and Satya form Brahmaloka. Mahah is located between it and the plane of Svah. Performers of meritorious action attain to these heavenly worlds according to the nature of their works. Dwellers on these planes, except those who live in Brahmaloka, return to the earth after the exhaustion of the results of their action. Some of the dwellers in Brahmaloka also come back. But others attain Liberation from Brahmaloka after the completion of the cycle. The six higher planes and the earth, together with the seven nether worlds, constitute the relative universe. The happiness of the lower heavenly worlds, attained through Vedic sacrifices and philan-*

*thropic activities has been described in the previous verse. Now is described the Highest Heaven, or Brahmaloċa, the realm of Hiranyagarbha.*

## 11

But those wise men of tranquil minds who live in the forest on alms, practising penances appropriate to their stations of life and contemplating such deities as Hiranyagarbha, depart, freed from impurities, by the Path of the Sun, to the place where that immortal Person dwells whose nature is imperishable.

**THOSE WISE MEN:** The text refers to the worshippers of Saguna Brahman: pious householders and those who, having retired from the world after the completion of the householder's life, go to the forest to lead the life of contemplation (vānaprastha) or of monasticism (sannyāsa). The monks referred to here are not those who contemplate the supreme attributeless Brahman.

**TRANQUIL MINDS:** Tranquillity is the result of the control of the sense-organs. No deep spiritual experience is possible without inner serenity.

**PENANCES ETC:** Certain austerities prescribed in the Vedas for the vānaprasthas and sannyāsins, belonging to the third and fourth stages of life.

**FREED FROM IMPURITIES:** The impressions created by their good and bad deeds are consumed, as it were, in the fire of Knowledge.

**PATH OF THE SUN:** Known as the Devayāna, or Way of the Gods. (See p. 70.)

**THE PLACE WHERE ETC:** That is to say, Brahmaloċa. This is the highest plane in the relative universe. The pursuit of the lower knowledge (aparā vidyā) enables one to go as far as Brahmaloċa.

**IMMORTAL PERSON:** Known as Brahmā or Hiranyagarbha. His immortality is relative only; it lasts for one complete cycle of the projection, preservation, and dissolution of the universe.

This verse describes what is known as kramamukti, gradual liberation. The persons here referred to are those who worship Saguna Brahman with whole-souled devotion, giving up all desires for transitory enjoyments on earth or in the heavenly worlds. They do not return to earth or go to any other lower plane. They dwell in Brahmaloċa, absorbed in contemplation of Hiranyagarbha, and attain final Liberation at the end of the cycle, when Hiranyagarbha Himself merges in the Absolute. The true Liberation, according to Non-dualistic Vedānta, is the attainment of the Knowledge of the attributeless Brahman, which can be realized here in the seeker's lifetime without his going to any other plane of existence. Those who engage

in ritualistic worship or humanitarian activities or who fulfill their domestic duties—all with a view to acquiring merit for enjoying happiness hereafter—go, after death, to one of the lower heavens. But worship and spiritual disciplines performed without selfish motive can lead one as far as Brahmaloka. Those who pursue the Knowledge of the attributeless Brahman, but die before attaining it, also go to Brahmaloka. According to Non-dualistic Vedānta, the seeker of final Liberation must renounce all desires and realize his oneness with the attributeless Brahman.

*Now is described the discipline of those blessed aspirants who turn away from all relative existence, which is characterized by action and its result. They alone are entitled to the Knowledge of Nirguna Brahman.*

## 12

Let a brāhmin, after having examined all these worlds that are gained by works, acquire freedom from desires: nothing that is eternal can be produced by what is not eternal. In order that he may understand that Eternal, let him, fuel in hand, approach a guru who is well versed in the Vedas and always devoted to Brahman.

**BRĀHMIN:** According to Vedāntic tradition, a brāhmin is specially qualified for total renunciation of the world and pursuit of the Knowledge of Brahman. Any sincere seeker of Brahman is entitled to be called a brāhmin.

**AFTER HAVING ETC:** The sacrifices and other ritualistic actions described in the Vedas belong to the lower knowledge. They are intended for people who are still victims of ignorance and who perform actions for the fulfilment of desires on earth or in heaven. Those persons who obey the Vedic injunctions enjoy happiness in lower or higher heavens, and those who disregard them or engage in actions forbidden in the Vedas assume various subhuman bodies. Even the felicity of Brahmaloka is insignificant when compared with the bliss that arises from Self-Knowledge. The seeker of Truth examines the results of action by means of direct experience, inference, analogies, and scriptural evidence, and realizes their transitory nature.

**WORLDS THAT ARE ETC:** The following is adapted from Śankara's commentary:

"The worlds gained as a result of action, from the plane of Brahṁā to that of the lowest organism, whether subtle or gross, belong to samsāra, or the relative universe. Like seed and tree, these worlds are bound by the law of cause and effect and are mutually related. They are beset with a hundred thousand troubles and are unsubstantial, like the pith of a plantain tree.

They are illusory, like objects conjured up by magic, like the water of a mirage, like a castle in the air, or like dreams. They are unstable, like foam and bubbles. These worlds are attained only by those ignorant fools who perform good or bad deeds impelled by worldly desires." Even the highest happiness of heaven and a life covering aeons are insignificant and ephemeral compared to the eternity and the undying bliss of Self-Knowledge.

**NOTHING THAT IS ETERNAL ETC:** There is nothing in the universe that is not produced from a cause. An effect endures as long as the momentum of the cause that gave rise to it endures. Therefore all relative things are non-eternal. Works produce four kinds of results: creation, as in the case of a new pot or a chair; the reaching of a destination, as in a journey; transformation, as in the case of curds made from milk; and purification, as in the making of gold through smelting. Beyond this nothing can be accomplished through karma. But Brahman is eternal, immutable, ever pure, and is the inmost consciousness of man. Unlike any of the results here enumerated, It cannot be produced. Thus the seeker of Brahman does not engage in action for the attainment of his ideal. He achieves it by the destruction of ignorance through the disciplines of discrimination, detachment, and communion with Brahman.

**THAT ETERNAL:** Which is also all Goodness, all Peace, and all Bliss.

**FUEL IN HAND:** In ancient India the disciple gathered for his spiritual preceptor the sacrificial fuel, drew his water, tended his cattle, and rendered him other forms of personal service. Through these acts he cultivated the humility, reverence, and devotion for the guru essential for acquiring spiritual knowledge.

**APPROACH:** According to Vedic tradition, spiritual knowledge can be gained only through personal contact with a teacher. A candle can be ignited only from another light. "Even though well versed in the scriptures, one should not independently seek the Knowledge of Brahman." (*Śaṅkarāchārya*.)

**GURU:** A spiritual teacher should possess self-control, inner serenity, and compassion. Above all, he must be endowed with Self-Knowledge.

**WELL VERSED IN THE VEDAS:** Otherwise the teacher cannot remove the disciple's doubts.

**ALWAYS DEVOTED TO ETC:** The direct Knowledge of Brahman is certainly the most important qualification of a spiritual teacher. He should renounce all other activities and engage in the thought of Brahman alone.

They alone who have understood the utter unsubstantiality of the world and become detached from it can be called true seekers of the Knowledge of Brahman.

*The transmission of the Knowledge of Brahman:*

## 13

To that pupil who has duly approached him, whose mind is completely serene, and whose senses are controlled, the wise teacher should indeed rightly impart the Knowledge of Brahman, through which one knows the immutable and the true Purusha.

**DULY APPROACHED:** Following the injunctions of the scriptures. He must be endowed with humility, the spirit of service, and genuine yearning.

**COMPLETELY SERENE:** That is to say free from pride and other similar blemishes.

**SHOULD INDEED RIGHTLY ETC:** "The duty of the preceptor is to help the qualified pupil who has duly approached him to cross the great ocean of ignorance." (*Śāṅkarāchārya*.)

**KNOWLEDGE OF BRAHMAN:** Compare: I. i. 6.

**PURUSHA:** Person. Etymologically the word means that which fills all (*purnatvāt*) or that which dwells in the body (*puri śayanāt*). The Dualists and the Qualified Non-dualists use the word to denote the Personal God associated with a form. According to the Non-dualists it signifies the Supreme Being, or Brahman. The word also means an individual person.

*Here ends the Second Chapter  
of the First Mundaka.*

## CHAPTER I

**THIS IS THE TRUTH:** As, from a blazing fire, sparks essentially akin to it fly forth by the thousand, so also, my good friend, do various beings come forth from the imperishable Brahman and unto Him again return.

**TRUTH:** The truth here referred to is the ultimate Truth, in contrast to the truth mentioned in I. ii. 1. The latter is only a relative truth, being the object of the lower knowledge and also being associated with work and its results. The truth stated here is the goal of the Higher Knowledge.

**AS, FROM ETC:** Brahman, the goal of the Higher Knowledge, is realized only in immediate and direct awareness. It cannot be objectified like a physical thing or a mental idea. For that reason Brahman is here described to the disciple indirectly, by means of an illustration, to make it as clear as an object of direct perception.

**ESSENTIALLY AKIN ETC:** The sparks have essentially the same nature as the fire: both are endowed with heat and light. Likewise, consciousness is the essential nature of both jiva and Brahman.

**VARIOUS BEINGS:** The multiplicity of beings is due to the multiplicity of the upādhis with which Brahman is associated through māyā. Vedānta gives the illustration of ākāśa, which is really one and without a second. Limited by receptacles or pots of different sizes, however, it appears to be diverse—as, for example, the ākāśa in a pot, the ākāśa in a jar, the ākāśa in a tumbler. Likewise, Brahman also appears as diverse beings on account of Its association, through māyā, with upādhis of many names and forms.

**AGAIN RETURN:** In the end all phenomenal beings, without exception, are absorbed in Brahman.

Though the multiplicity of jivas is the result of Brahman's association, through māyā, with various bodies, each characterized by a name and a form, Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, Itself is one and indivisible. One may try to understand this profound Vedāntic truth by means of an illustration: Imagine a lake covered by a sheet of ice. Further imagine that there are innumerable holes of different sizes in the ice, through which one can see water in different shapes. In reality the water is one and indivisible; but there appear to be many forms and shapes of water on

account of its association with the holes of different sizes. The water of the lake stands for the non-dual Brahman, and the sheet of ice, for māyā, or ignorance; the holes may be compared to the various physical bodies, and the portions of water seen through them, to the jivas, or individual consciousnesses. When, on the melting of the ice, the holes are destroyed, the portions of water in them disappear in the water of the lake. Likewise, when, on the destruction of ignorance, the bodies created by ignorance disappear, the consciousnesses limited by the bodies merge in Pure Consciousness. From the indivisible water of the lake are produced various shapes and sizes of water, through its association with the various holes made possible by the covering sheet of ice; and into the same indivisible water they ultimately disappear when the ice and its effect, the holes, are destroyed. Likewise, out of Pure Consciousness come forth, through māyā, various jivas, and to It they return when māyā and its effect, names and forms, are destroyed. Brahman limited by māyā, or Saguna Brahman, is both the material and the efficient cause of the universe and all living beings. There is, however, no real difference between Brahman with attributes and without them.

Samsāra, the object of the lower knowledge, has been dealt with in the foregoing chapter. Brahman is its root and substratum; into Brahman it disappears again. When one knows Brahman one knows all the objects of the universe. The present chapter will describe Brahman.

*The previous verse has described Saguna Brahman as the cause and the ultimate goal of all living beings. The following verse indicates Nirguna Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, which is higher than Saguna Brahman, being free from the diversity of upādhis. It is described by a negation of attributes.*

He is the self-luminous and formless Purusha, uncreated and existing both within and without. He is devoid of prāna, devoid of mind, pure, and higher than the supreme Imperishable.

**HE:** The attributeless Pure Consciousness, known as Nirguna Brahman.

**SELF-LUMINOUS:** The word may also mean causeless and distinct from all that is relative

**PURUSHA:** The all-pervading Brahman, who dwells in all bodies as Consciousness.

**UNCREATED:** All changes follow birth or creation. The birthlessness of Brahman also implies an absence of all modifications, such as growth, transformation, decay, and death.



**DEVOID OF PRĀNA . . . MIND:** Through ignorance people associate Ātman with different bodies and believe It to possess prāna, mind, and senses. But prāna, mind, and senses do not inhere in Ātman. The knower of Truth realizes Ātman to be devoid of prāna, whose characteristics are motion and the power to act. Likewise, It is devoid of mind, which is endowed with the capacity to know diversity and is also characterized by doubt and volition. Ātman is free from mind and intellect and the organs of perception and action.

**SUPREME IMPERISHABLE:** The word Imperishable (Akshara) here means Saguna Brahman, in which the upādhis of the names and forms of the manifested universe exist in a seed state. It is the seed of all causes and effects seen in the relative world. Saguna Brahman is called supreme because It is higher than all the diverse entities in the manifested universe, which are Its modifications. The attributeless Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, is superior to Saguna Brahman, or the seed state, because It is beyond māyā and all differentiation, manifest or unmanifest. It permeates Saguna Brahman and the multiplicity of the universe, as cloth permeates its warp and woof. It is the transcendental and unrelated Ground of all relativity. Prāna, mind, and senses are later stages in the evolution of prakṛti; therefore they are absent in Pure Consciousness.

*Nirguna Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, is without attributes; but in association with māyā, Brahman is called the cause of creation. Whenever the Upanishads speak of Brahman as the cause of creation, they really refer to this latter, Saguna Brahman.*

## 3

From Him are born prāna, mind, all the sense-organs, ākāśa, air, fire, water, and earth, which supports all.

**ARE BORN:** The creation is illusory. From the standpoint of Pure Consciousness the created objects do not exist. It is through māyā, or nescience, alone that Brahman appears as the universe and all created objects.

**ĀKĀŚA ETC:** For the creation of the various elements and for the cosmology, consult *Vedāntasāra*, *Panchadaśi*, or any other authoritative book on the Vedānta philosophy. (See pp. 152-153.)

As before creation, so also afterwards, Brahman is free from prāna, mind, and sense-organs. These are modifications of Saguna Brahman and therefore have no independent existence. According to Vedānta all modifications are unreal; they are mere words. A tray, a tumbler, and a cup, made from clay, have no existence independent of the clay, which is their only real substance.

They are mere names used for convenience in man's practical life. Being in themselves unreal, prāna, mind, and sense-organs do not exist, as such, in Brahman before or after creation. A childless man cannot be called a father simply because of his dreaming about a son. The creation is like a dream. Just as the dream is real to the dreamer, so the world is real to the unilluminated person and continues to be so till he awakens to the light of Truth.

*The imperishable and attributeless Absolute has been briefly described in the second verse of this chapter. Now the same Entity, the subject matter of the Higher Knowledge, is discussed in detail. It has been reiterated that the attributeless Absolute is not essentially different from Saguna Brahman, who is the direct cause of creation.*

## 4

The heavens are His head; the sun and moon, His eyes; the quarters, His ears; the revealed Vedas, His speech; the wind is His breath; the universe, His heart. From His feet is produced the earth. He is, indeed, the inner Self of all beings.

THE HEAVENS: The word in the text is agni, which generally means fire. But the Vedas sometimes use this word to denote the heavens.

REVEALED: According to orthodox Hindu tradition the Vedas are without beginning (anādi), eternal (nitya), and not ascribable to human authorship (apauresheya). The supersensuous truths embodied in them were revealed by the Lord Himself, in the beginning, to the rishis, or seers.

UNIVERSE ETC: The tangible universe is a modification of mind. It is not perceived in deep sleep: it then disappears into mind. During the waking state the various tangible forms are produced from mind. Mind here refers, of course, to the Cosmic Mind.

In this verse Brahman is conceived of as Virāt, the first embodied manifestation of the Lord as the totality of the bodies in the universe, and also as the inmost Self of all beings. Virāt is present in all beings as the seer, hearer, and knower. He is also the infinite, all-pervading Spirit (Vishnu).

*The evolution of living beings from Brahman:*

## 5

From Him comes the Fire whose fuel is the sun; from the moon comes rain; from rain, the herbs that grow on the earth; from the herbs.

the seminal fluid which a man pours into a woman. Thus many living beings are born of the Purusha.

**FIRE:** The heavens.

**FUEL:** The heavens are illumined by the sun.

This verse refers to the Five Fires described in the third chapter of the fifth part of the *Chhândogya Upanishad*. According to the story, Śvetaketu, the son of the rishi Gautama, visited Pravāhana, the king of Panchāla. The king asked him five questions, one of which was whether Śvetaketu knew how the fifth oblation offered at the sacrifice was transformed into a human body. Unable to give the answer, the boy went to his father, who also was ignorant about it. The king explained the matter thus to Gautama: The heavens that one sees above are a Fire; the other four Fires are rain, earth, man, and woman. The meaning of the above statement is this: The oblations offered in the sacrificial fire consist mostly of a liquid substance which accompanies the soul of the sacrificer to the Plane of the Moon after his death. After enjoying the apportioned happiness there, the soul comes down to the sky (the heavens) and dwells in a cloud. Next it falls to earth with the rain and is absorbed by herbs and plants. When the plants are eaten by man and transformed into his semen, the soul dwells in the semen. Last of all it enters the womb of a woman and is born in a human body. Therefore the heavens, rain, earth, man, and woman are described as five kinds of sacrificial fire, and the soul's journey through them is compared to the offering of an oblation. The Purusha, or Brahman, is the final cause of all beings. The Upanishad explains man's origin and journey as a spiritual act.

*Furthermore:*

## 6

From Him have come the Rik, the Sāman, the Yajus, the Dikshā, all sacrifices, the Kratus, gifts, the year, the sacrificer, and the worlds which the moon sanctifies and the sun illumines.

**RIK:** A group of versified Vedic mantras. The mantras of the Rig-Veda, whose letters, feet (one fourth part of a stanza is a foot), and endings are determined by rule, and which are marked by chhandas (metres) such as the Gāyatri.

**SĀMAN:** A group of Vedic mantras with their various classifications. These are set to music.

**YAJUS:** A group of Vedic mantras written in prose, whose letters, endings, and so on, are not determined by any rule.

**DIKSHĀ:** A ceremony preliminary to a sacrifice, in which, among other details, the sacrificer wears a cord of munjā grass.

**SACRIFICES:** Such as the Agnihotra.

**KRĀTUS:** A sacrifice which requires a sacrificial post and in which animals are slaughtered.

**GIFTS:** Ranging from the giving of a cow to that of untold wealth.

**YEAR:** The stipulated time for the performance of a sacrifice.

**WORLDS:** The planes where the sacrificers go after death to enjoy the fruit of their religious rites.

**MOON:** Refers to Chandraloka, or the Plane of the Moon, where unilluminated souls go, after death, following the Southern Path. (See p. 70; B. G. VIII. 25.)

**SUN:** Suryaloka, or the Plane of the Sun, where illuminated souls go after death, following the Northern Path; another name of Brahmaloka. (See p. 70; also B. G. VIII. 24.)

The scriptures and the religious rites prescribed by them all have a spiritual origin.

*Furthermore:*

## 7

By Him are begotten the various devas, the sādhyas, men, cattle, birds, and also prāna and apāna, rice and corn, penance, faith, truth, continence, and law.

**DEVAS:** Lit., shining ones. The sacrifices are performed to propitiate these deities in order to enjoy, through their favour, happiness here on earth and hereafter.

**SĀDHYAS:** A class of celestial beings.

**CATTLE:** Both domestic and wild.

**PRĀNA AND APĀNA:** Prāna is that part of the vital force which regulates a man's breath. Apāna works downwards and helps in the ejection of unassimilated food and drink. (See p. 90.)

**RICE AND CORN:** Which are used in the sacrifices.

**PENANCE:** Men performing sacrifices are required to practise spiritual austerities for the purification of their minds. The penance also produces its own result.

**FAITH:** An affirmative attitude of mind which accepts as true the revelations of the scriptures regarding the immortality of the soul and the reality of Brahman. Such an attitude begets inner calmness and helps in the fulfilment of various endeavours.

TRUTH: A true report which at the same time does not hurt others' feelings.

This verse describes the spiritual origin of various beings, forces, and objects.

*All the works performed by illumined and unillumined persons may be regarded as sacrificial acts. The work, its auxiliaries, and its result all proceed from Brahman.*

## 8

From Him have sprung the seven prānas, the seven flames, the seven kinds of fuel, the seven oblations, and also the seven planes where move the prānas, lying in the cave, which are seven in each living being.

SEVEN PRĀNAS: They are located in the head: the two eyes, the two ears, the two nostrils, and the mouth.

SEVEN FLAMES: The seven acts of sensation produced by the seven prānas.

SEVEN KINDS OF FUEL: The seven objects. The prānas are lighted, as it were, by objects.

SEVEN OBLATIONS: The seven forms of knowledge which are the results of sensation.

SEVEN PLANES: The seven centres where the prānas are located.

PRĀNAS: Here again the word prānas refers to the two eyes, the two ears, the two nostrils, and the mouth, and not to the vital forces, usually denoted by the prānas. Though each of these prānas functions in a special centre of its own, yet they are all coordinated by the mind.

LYING IN THE CAVE: The prānas have their centres in the body; at the time of deep sleep their presence is felt only in the heart. The word cave denotes both body and heart.

WHICH ARE SEVEN ETC: In each living being function seven prānas, created by Brahman.

All activities may be regarded as sacrifices performed for the propitiation of the Deity. An ordinary sense perception may be looked upon in that spirit: the objects of the senses are given as offerings in the sacrificial fire of the senses. For a seeker of the Self, the senses, their objects, and the perceiver are all Brahman. (See B. G. IV. 24.) He worships Brahman alone through all actions. Actions, instruments of action, and results of action, belonging to the illumined or the unillumined, have all been produced from Brahman.

*Furthermore:*

## 9

From Him come all the oceans and the mountains; from Him flow rivers of every kind; from Him have come, as well, all plants and flavours, by which the inner self subsists surrounded by the elements.

**PLANTS:** Corn, rice, barley, and the rest.

**FLAVOURS:** There are six kinds of flavour (*rasa*), namely, bitter, sour, saline, pungent, sweet, and astringent.

**INNER SELF:** Refers to the the subtle body, which lies between the gross body and the Self (*Ātman*). It acts as the self of the gross body.

**SUBSISTS:** The subtle body cannot dwell in the gross body if food is renounced.

**SURROUNDED BY ETC:** That is to say, by the five gross elements which constitute the gross body.

*It has been stated above that everything is born of Brahman. He alone is the cause of all, as clay is the cause of all earthenware. According to Vedānta there is no essential difference between the cause and the effect. So there is no real difference between Brahman and material objects.*

## 10

The Purusha alone is verily the universe, which consists of work and austerity. O my good friend, he who knows this Brahman—the Supreme and the Immortal, hidden in the cave of the heart—cuts asunder even here the knot of ignorance.

**THE PURUSHA ETC:** The universe has no existence apart from Brahman.

**WORK AND AUSTERITY:** The universe cannot exist apart from work and austerity. They sustain it. Work signifies sacrifices and their results; austerity, knowledge and its result. They are all produced from Brahman. The meaning is that the universe, with all animate and inanimate objects, is nothing but Brahman.

**CAVE OF THE HEART:** That is to say, in the hearts of all beings.

**EVEN HERE:** Before the dissolution of the body.

**IGNORANCE:** Consisting of desires, actions, and their results.

The Upanishad began with a question regarding that by the knowing of which all can be known. The answer has been given. The universe and all things therein are born of Brahman, or the Supreme Self. They are

nothing but Brahman. Therefore when one knows Brahman one knows the universe. This Knowledge is to be attained here on earth, when one still dwells in the body, by realizing the identity of the self with Brahman. Its attainment is known as jivanmukti, or Liberation in life.

*Here ends the First Chapter  
of the Second Mundaka.*

## CHAPTER II

THE LUMINOUS BRAHMAN dwells in the cave of the heart and is known to move there. It is the great support of all; for in It is centred everything that moves, breathes, and blinks. O disciples, know that to be your Self—that which is both gross and subtle, which is adorable, supreme, and beyond the understanding of creatures.

**LUMINOUS:** Brahman is manifest in all entities as existence (*asti*), luminosity (*bhāti*), and bliss (*priya*).

**DWELLS ETC:** Associated with the functions of the senses and the mind, such as hearing, thinking, seeing, and knowing. The senses themselves are inert and unconscious. It is the light of Ātman that enables them to perceive objects. It is Brahman, again, which appears, through *avidyā*, to have become the *jiva*, or individual self, who experiences through the sense-organs objects of form, sound, taste, and so on. Thus one should contemplate Brahman as the Self, the Ground of all experiences.

**CAVE ETC:** The presence of Brahman is felt in the heart as the knower, hearer, seer, and so on.

**IS KNOWN ETC:** It is the light of Ātman that shines in all the passing states of mind. Therefore Ātman appears to be moving.

**IS CENTRED:** Like the spokes in the nave of a wheel.

**BEYOND THE UNDERSTANDING ETC:** Brahman is beyond the ordinary undisciplined intellect.

Brahman is without any form. How, then, can It be known? The Upanishad describes the method of Its realization: All things perceived in the universe are effects and therefore limited. They are dependent upon something else, which is their cause. Brahman is the cause and support of everything, gross and subtle, and also of *māyā*. That Brahman, again, is the inmost Self of all and the illuminer of their mental states.

*A material entity, like a chariot, moves when directed by an intelligent rider. Likewise, the senses, the mind, and the prāna perform their respective functions when guided by Pure Consciousness. Consciousness is indivisible. It dwells in all as the inmost Self. This is the way one should think of Brahman.*



## 2

That which is radiant, subtler than the subtle, That by which all the worlds and their inhabitants are supported—That, verily, is the indestructible Brahman; That is the prāṇa, speech, and the mind; That is the True and That is the Immortal. That alone is to be struck. Strike It, my good friend.

**RADIANT:** It is by the light of Brahman that luminous objects like the sun, the stars, fire, and lightning are illumined.

**SUBTLE:** The reference is to small objects, such as a grain of barley. It is also to be understood that Brahman is greater than the great. Brahman permeates all objects, subtle and great.

**WORLDS:** Including the celestial planes.

**SUPPORTED:** Consciousness (Chaitanyam) is the substratum of all relative existence.

**THE PRĀṆA ETC:** The prāṇa, the senses, and the mind cannot exist without the substratum of Pure Consciousness.

**TO BE STRUCK:** That is to say, to be known by the mind.

**STRIKE IT:** That is to say, concentrate your mind on Brahman.

*How is Brahman to be struck? The aspirant should concentrate his mind on the oneness of Brahman and the self through the help of Om. The result is the attainment of Liberation by gradual stages.*

## 3

Take the Upanishad as the bow, the great weapon, and place upon it the arrow sharpened by meditation. Then, having drawn it back with a mind directed to the thought of Brahman, strike that mark, O my good friend—that which is the Imperishable.

**UPANISHAD:** The essence of the Upanishad is Brahman, whose symbol is Om. (See the next verse.)

**ARROW:** The individual soul, which is a reflection of Consciousness, or Brahman.

**SHARPENED ETC:** By means of uninterrupted meditation the individual soul rids itself of impurities and becomes qualified to meditate on Brahman.

**HAVING DRAWN ETC:** That is to say, the sense-organs should be withdrawn from their objects and the mind directed to Brahman alone.

By contemplating the meaning of Om and repeating the sound, the aspirant realizes his self to be the reflection of Brahman. The meditation on the

ātman as such is denoted by the placing of the arrow upon the bow. The realization that the reflected consciousness is identical with Pure Consciousness is described as striking the mark. Beginners are advised to meditate on Brahman through the symbol Om.

*The illustration of the foregoing verse is fully explained:*

## 4

Om is the bow; the ātman is the arrow; Brahman is said to be the mark. It is to be struck by an undistracted mind. Then the ātman becomes one with Brahman, as the arrow with the target.

OM IS THE BOW: As the bow is the cause of the arrow's entering into the target, so Om is the cause of the ātman's entering into Brahman. The ātman becomes purified through the constant repetition of Om, and then with the support of this mystic syllable is absorbed in Brahman.

THE ĀTMAN: Here the word means the reflection of the Supreme Self, which is like the reflection of the sun in water. This is called the individual self, the cognizer of the different states of the mind. Like an arrow, it is discharged at the Supreme Self, the immortal Brahman. Therefore Brahman is said to be its mark.

BY AN UNDISTRACTED ETC: The mind of the aspirant should be free from restlessness caused by longing for external objects. It should be detached from the world. Through a mind disciplined by self-control and concentration one can realize Brahman.

THEN THE ĀTMAN ETC: After reaching Brahman, the ātman becomes one with It. Just as the goal of the arrow, after it has been discharged from the bow, is to be absorbed in the mark, so the goal of the ātman is to become one with Brahman through the elimination of such erroneous ideas as are created by its identification with the body, the mind, and the senses.

*It is extremely hard to comprehend the imperishable Brahman. Therefore the teacher exhorts the disciples to give up all vain actions and concentrate on Brahman alone.*

## 5

In Him are woven heaven, earth, and the space between, and the mind with all the sense-organs. Know that non-dual Ātman alone and give up all other talk. He is the bridge to Immortality.

ĀTMAN: He is the inmost Self of men and of all living beings.

**GIVE UP ETC:** After knowing Ātman as such, one should strive for Its realization, giving up everything relating to the lower knowledge.

**TALK:** All talk related to the lower knowledge is futile, nay harmful, for the seeker of Brahman.

**BRIDGE TO IMMORTALITY:** Only through Self-Knowledge can one cross the ocean of interminable births and deaths and attain Immortality. Ātman is immortal, and to know oneself as Ātman is Immortality. Compare: "By knowing Him alone one goes beyond death; there is no other way to Liberation."

*The preceptor gives his blessings to the qualified student for the attainment of Knowledge:*

## 6

He moves about, becoming manifold, within the heart, where the arteries meet, like the spokes fastened in the nave of a chariot wheel. Meditate on Ātman as Om. Hail to you! May you cross beyond the sea of darkness!

**BECOMING MANIFOLD:** The individual self reflected in the mind (jivātmā) identifies itself with pleasure, pain, anger, love, and other states of mind. Thus one says: "I am happy," "I am unhappy," "I am angry," and so on, depending upon a particular state of mind. But this identification is the result of māyā. Ātman is in reality non-dual and unchanging.

**HEART:** The seers of the Upanishads often describe the heart as the dwelling-place of Ātman, or Brahman (Brahmapuram). In meditation one feels Its presence very vividly in the heart.

**OM:** Om is to be used as a symbol of Brahman.

**SEA OF DARKNESS:** Ignorance, or māyā.

It is the injunction of the scriptures that a qualified teacher should transmit the Knowledge of the Self to a disciple who, desirous of Liberation, has renounced the longing for material happiness here and hereafter.

*For mediocre aspirants the following instruction is given: they should contemplate Brahman in the lotus of the heart, shining through the various states of the mind. Thus they attain Liberation by gradual stages.*

## 7

He who knows all and understands all, and to whom belongs all the glory in the world—He, Ātman, is placed in the space in the effulgent

abode of Brahman. He assumes the forms of the mind and leads the body and the senses. He dwells in the body, inside the heart. By the knowledge of That which shines as the blissful and immortal Ātman, the wise behold Him fully in all things.

**UNDERSTANDS ALL ETC:** He, the all-pervading and omniscient Lord, knows all collectively and understands everything individually.

**ALL THE GLORY ETC:** Compare: "Under the mighty rule of this Immutable, O Gārgi, the sun and moon are held in their positions; under the mighty rule of this Immutable, O Gārgi, heaven and earth maintain their positions." (*Br. Up.* III. viii. 9.) The law, beauty, power, and energy that one sees in the universe are the expression of Brahman's glory.

**EFFULGENT ABODE ETC:** The aspirant contemplates Brahman in the heart as a smokeless, brilliant light.

**HE ASSUMES ETC:** Consciousness ordinarily remains identified with the states of the mind.

**LEADS THE BODY ETC:** He leads the subtle body, after death, to the future gross body.

**BODY:** The word *anna*, meaning food, here signifies the body, which is built up and sustained by food.

**BY THE KNOWLEDGE ETC:** One obtains this knowledge from the scriptures, as explained by a qualified teacher and assimilated through the practice of such spiritual disciplines as control of the mind and the senses, meditation, detachment from desires, and renunciation of material objects.

The seeker first realizes the Supreme Knowledge, which confers upon him Bliss and Immortality, directly within himself and then realizes it everywhere and in all objects.

### *The fruit of Self-Knowledge:*

#### 8

The fetters of the heart are broken, all doubts are resolved, and all works cease to bear fruit, when He is beheld who is both high and low.

**FETTERS:** That is to say, the various desires that cling to the heart prior to the Knowledge of Ātman.

**DOUBTS:** The continuous stream of doubt that plagues a man as long as he lives, is destroyed with the attainment of Self-Knowledge.

**ALL WORKS ETC:** The Knowledge of Ātman destroys the effect of the karma performed by a man in his previous lives and also of that performed in the present life prior to the attainment of Knowledge—the karma which

has not yet begun to bear fruit. It also destroys the karma performed by him at the time of or subsequent to the attainment of Knowledge. But this does not apply to the karma that has produced his present body and has begun to bear fruit. Such karma is destroyed only when all the fruit has been reaped. The body lasts as long as the momentum given to it by this karma endures. An illumined soul, however, on account of his total detachment from the body and mind, is not affected by any kind of karma.

*Brahman described in the foregoing verses, is again explained:*

## 9

There the stainless and indivisible Brahman shines in the highest, golden sheath. It is pure; It is the Light of lights; It is That which they know who know the Self.

**STAINLESS:** Free from the taint of ignorance and its effects.

**INDIVISIBLE:** Because Brahman is incorporeal.

**HIGHEST ETC:** The sheath referred to here is the buddhi, or intellect. Brahman lies in the buddhi, like a sword encased in a sheath; that is to say, It is most vividly manifest in the buddhi, which is described as golden because it is endowed with reason and knowledge and is therefore superior to the other organs. Brahman manifests Itself, no doubt, through the other sheaths, for instance the physical and the mental; but Its direct expression is through the buddhi, which is subtler than the body, the prāna, or the mind. By the intellect alone, when it is devoid of all impurities, Brahman is realized. (For an explanation of the sheaths, see p. 91.)

**THE LIGHT OF LIGHTS:** The light of such luminous objects as fire, lightning, and the sun is derived from the light of Brahman, which dwells in all hearts as Ātman.

**THEY KNOW:** The wise perceive Ātman as the Witness of the different states of the mind.

It is through knowledge of the inner Self, and not through study of external objects, that one directly knows Brahman.

*Why Brahman is the Light of lights:*

## 10

The sun does not shine there, nor the moon and the stars, nor these lightnings, not to speak of this fire. When He shines, everything shines after Him; by His light everything is lighted.

**THE SUN ETC:** The sun illumines all material objects. But this power is not inherent in the sun itself; it is derived from the self-luminous Brahman, which is the inmost Ātman of all things, including the sun.

When a torch illumines our path, it is the fire and not the fire-brand that destroys the darkness. Likewise, material objects are illumined by the light of Brahman through the sun, the moon, the stars, lightning, and fire. Again, it is the light of Brahman, the inmost Ātman, that illumines the states of the mind. Thus from the observation of outer objects, such as the sun and moon, and also of the inner states of the mind, one can infer the light of Brahman. A thing that is non-luminous in itself, like a pot, cannot reveal another object. When the external world disappears and the mind itself ceases to function, as in the deepest contemplation of the mystics, Brahman shines directly, without the help of any medium.

According to the Upanishadic teachings, as explained by the Non-dualists, the entire objective universe is possible only in so far as it is sustained by a Knowing Subject. It is the Consciousness of Ātman as Knower which manifests the universe. Even such luminous objects as the sun, the moon, and fire cannot reveal themselves unless they become manifest by the Consciousness of the Knower. These material objects have no light of their own. Everything shines by the light of Ātman, the Subject.

*Brahman alone is real. It alone exists. All that one perceives, through ignorance, to be endowed with changing names and forms is in reality nothing but the immortal and unchanging Brahman.*

## 11

That immortal Brahman alone is before, that Brahman is behind, that Brahman is to the right and left. Brahman alone pervades everything above and below; this universe is that Supreme Brahman alone.

**PERVADES EVERYTHING:** Brahman is the reality of all things endowed with name and form.

Through ignorance one sees, in place of Brahman, the universe of names and forms outside oneself, and in place of Ātman, or Pure Consciousness, the individualized body and mind. This false vision creates the illusion of such pairs of opposites as good and evil, life and death, freedom and bondage, light and darkness. It is the cause of man's grief and suffering. Since the multiplicity of names and forms is the result of ignorance, what he is really seeing outside and inside is Pure Brahman and Ātman, which are identical. Thus a man is nothing but Pure Consciousness, eternally free, illumined, and blest, and the universe, too, is of the same nature,

even when, under the spell of ignorance, he regards himself as a bound creature living in a finite universe and practises spiritual discipline to obtain freedom. When the Truth is known, the illusion of duality disappears and the universe, known as non-Brahman to the ignorant, reveals itself as the effulgent Brahman.

*Here ends the Second Chapter  
of the Second Mundaka.*

# THIRD MUNDAKA.

## CHAPTER I

**TWO BIRDS**, united always and known by the same name, closely cling to the same tree. One of them eats the sweet fruit; the other looks on without eating.

**TWO BIRDS**: The literal meaning of *suparna*, the Sanskrit word in the text, is "of good wings." The two birds refer to the *jivātmā*, or individual soul, and the *Paramātmā*, or Supreme Self. The former is Pure Consciousness conditioned by the body and mind on account of its association with ignorance (*avidyā*). The latter is Pure Consciousness, the Lord Himself, who is eternally pure, free, and illumined and is the master or controller of *avidyā*.

**UNITED ALWAYS**: The *jivātmā* is the reflection of the *Paramātmā* in the *buddhi*. The two are inseparable companions, like an object and its reflection.

**SAME NAME**: That is to say, *Ātman*.

**TREE**: Refers to the body. "Like a tree, the body is subject to destruction. It has its root above, in Brahman; and its branches (such as the *prāna* and the organs) spread downward. It is supported by *māyā*, or ignorance; and on it hang the diverse fruits of the actions of living beings." (*Śaṅkarāchārya*.) (See *Ka. Up.* II. iii. 1.)

**ONE OF THEM**: Namely, the individual soul, or *jiva*.

**EATS**: On account of lack of discrimination. The *jiva* identifies himself with the body and experiences the fruits of action.

**SWEET FRUIT**: The fruits have various tastes and are characterized by pain and pleasure.

**THE OTHER**: The Lord who is the Witness. The word refers to Pure Consciousness, which is endowed with such attributes as omniscience and omnipresence. He is the controller of both the individual soul and the body and is the detached Witness of their activities.

The *Parā Vidyā*, or Higher Knowledge, by which the Truth can be realized, has already been explained. This Knowledge destroys the "fetters of the heart" and all doubts. Yoga, the practical discipline for the realization of Truth, has been described by the illustration of the bow. The present chapter deals with such other disciplines as continence and truthfulness, without which yoga cannot be practised.



*The suffering of the jiva is the result of his feeling of impotence. This impotence is destroyed by his knowledge of unity with the Lord.*

## 2

Seated on the same tree, the jiva moans, bewildered by his impotence. But when he beholds the other, the Lord worshipped by all, and His glory, he then becomes free from grief.

**SEATED ETC:** The grief of the jiva is the result of his identification with the body. "Under the heavy weight of ignorance, desire, action, and longing for the fruit of action, the jiva becomes drowned, as it were, in the ocean of the world. He is convinced beyond doubt that the body is Ātman and regards himself as the son or grandson of this or that man. He thinks, further, that he is lean or stout, endowed with or devoid of good qualities, and a victim of pleasure and pain, and that there exists nothing else but the tangible universe. Thus he comes under the sway of birth and death in this saṃsāra and believes himself to be united with or parted from friends and kinsmen." (*Śaṅkarāchārya*.)

**BEWILDERED:** The perplexity of the jiva is due to the numerous troubles inevitable in the worldly life, all the result of ignorance.

**IMPOTENCE:** "In a state of helplessness the jiva cries: 'I am completely powerless. I am good for nothing. I have lost my son; my wife is dead. What avails my life any more?'" (*Śaṅkarāchārya*.) The cause of man's suffering and impotence is māyā, under whose influence he first forgets his divine nature and then associates himself with many illusory notions.

**BEHOLDS ETC:** "The jiva, through attachment to the world, performs good and evil actions and thus assumes the body of a god, man, beast, bird, or inferior creature. Afterwards, as the result of virtuous actions, such as the practice of austerities and worship, performed by him in many previous births as well as in this life, he develops a longing for freedom and approaches a compassionate spiritual teacher and is shown the path of yoga. And at long last, through the practice of spiritual disciplines, such as non-violence, truthfulness, continence, renunciation, sense-control, and inner calmness, he is able to fix his mind on the Lord, contemplate Him, and obtain His vision." (*Śaṅkarāchārya*.)

**THE LORD:** Though dwelling in the body, the Lord is not conditioned by it. He is unaffected by saṃsāra: hunger and thirst, grief and suffering, old age and death.

**BY ALL:** Yogins, jñānis, and all other righteous people.

By the practice of spiritual discipline the embodied soul overcomes ignorance and realizes his oneness with the Lord dwelling in all bodies. Thus he gives up his false impotence and attains to his divine majesty.

*The idea of the previous verse is reiterated:*

## 3

When the seer beholds the self-luminous Creator, the Lord, the Purusha, the progenitor of Brahmā, then he, the wise seer, shakes off good and evil, becomes stainless, and reaches the supreme unity.

**SELF-LUMINOUS:** Or the word may mean "of golden hue," which is also an epithet of Brahman.

**PURUSHA:** The all-pervading Spirit.

**GOOD AND EVIL:** They both bind the embodied soul to the world.

All experiences belonging to duality are of an inferior order. The experience of non-duality, characterized by an attitude of sameness to all beings, alone is superior.

*The knower of Brahman is described:*

## 4

He indeed is Prāna; He shines forth variously in all beings. The wise man who knows Him does not babble. Revelling in the Self, delighting in the Self, performing actions, he is the foremost among the knowers of Brahman.

**PRĀNA:** Brahman is described as the Prāna of the prānas, that is to say, the life that animates the vital forces in the body.

**KNOWS HIM ETC:** Even if one understands only the meaning of the words regarding the oneness of the self and Brahman, one gives up vain talk.

**BABBLE:** A man who sees many things talks a great deal by way of describing them. He wants to excel others in conversation. But he who sees Brahman within and without speaks of Brahman alone. His speech is restrained.

**REVELLING ETC:** He does not relish any material possessions.

**DELIGHTING ETC:** He does not take delight in anything except Ātman.

**ACTIONS:** Such as the practice of knowledge, meditation, and detachment. The word does not refer to any rite or ceremony of worship. The knower of Brahman is not by any means lazy or inert.

*Aids for the attainment of Perfect Knowledge such as the practice of truth and self-control are prescribed. They all are related to the inner life.*

This Ātman, resplendent and pure, whom the sinless sannyāsins behold residing within the body, is attained by unceasing practice of truthfulness, austerity, right knowledge, and continence.

**SINLESS:** Free from such mental impurities as anger, passion, greed, and lust.

**SANNYĀSINS:** It is extremely difficult for anyone but a sannyāsin, or world-renouncing monk, to practise the spiritual disciplines necessary for Self-realization.

**WITHIN THE BODY:** That is to say, within the heart.

**TRUTHFULNESS:** A strict correspondence between words, thoughts, and deeds.

**AUSTERITY:** The word here signifies concentration of the mind and control of the senses.

**CONTINENCE:** Aspirants desiring Self-Knowledge must observe the vow of brahmacharya, or complete chastity.

The disciplines mentioned in this verse must be practised continuously and assiduously, and not by fits and starts. Further, they are meant for those seekers alone who are not yet completely established in the Knowledge of the Self. Afterwards these virtues are not cultivated any more; they become natural with knowers of the Self and remain with them as ornaments.

*The triumph of truthfulness is seen in daily experience and is also known from the evidence of the wise.*

Truth alone prevails, not falsehood. By truth the path is laid out, the Way of the Gods, on which the seers, whose every desire is satisfied, proceed to the Highest Abode of the True.

**TRUTH:** That is to say, the truthful person.

**LAI D OUT:** That is to say, the Way of the Gods is built and constantly maintained by truthful persons.

**THE WAY OF THE GODS:** By this path the seers arrive at the Abode of Brahmā (Brahmaloka). (See p. 70.)

**WHOSE EVERY DESIRE ETC:** That is to say, who are freed from deceit, delusion, pride, and falsity, and also from worldly desires. They have renounced all desires and all longing for worldly enjoyments.

**HIGHEST ABODE ETC:** The supreme realization to be attained by the practice of truth.

*What is that Highest Abode attainable through truth?*

## 7

That Brahman shines forth, vast, self-luminous, inconceivable, subtler than the subtle. He is far beyond what is far, and yet here very near at hand. Verily, He is seen here, dwelling in the cave of the heart of conscious beings.

**THAT BRAHMAN:** The all-pervading Brahman, which is attained by the practice of such spiritual disciplines as truth and continence.

**SHINES FORTH:** Through such luminous bodies as the sun, the moon, and the stars.

**SELF-LUMINOUS:** Unperceivable by the sense-organs.

**INCONCEIVABLE:** Because Brahman is beyond the experience of the senses.

**SUBTLER ETC:** It is subtler than ākāśa (space), which is the most subtle of the elements.

**FAR BEYOND ETC:** In the belief of ignorant people, to whom Brahman is the remotest entity.

**HERE VERY NEAR AT HAND:** In the experience of illumined people.

**VERILY, HE IS SEEN ETC:** That is to say, by yogins, or men endowed with Self-Knowledge, who see Brahman as the very Self of all conscious beings. It is because the Self is Consciousness that a living being can perform such actions as seeing, touching, and hearing.

The wise see Brahman dwelling in the hearts of all; but the unillumined, on account of the veil of ignorance, do not see It.

*The special discipline for the Knowledge of Brahman:*

## 8

Brahman is not grasped by the eye, nor by speech, nor by the other senses, nor by penance or good works. A man becomes pure through serenity of intellect; thereupon, in meditation, he beholds Him who is without parts.

**PENANCE:** One is said to be able to attain almost anything by means of penance.

**GOOD WORKS:** Such as the sacrifices described in the Vedas, by which one can enjoy happiness on earth and bliss in heaven.

**SERENITY OF INTELLECT:** The word *jñāna* here denotes the *buddhi*, or understanding, which is the instrument of knowledge. "The *buddhi* of every man is by nature pure, like a clean mirror or water, and therefore capable of Self-Knowledge. But, being polluted by attachment to external objects, it becomes unclean, like a stained mirror or like muddy water. (As dirt or mud are not inherent in the mirror or the water, so the attachment and desire do not inhere in the *buddhi*.) Thus the *buddhi* does not know *Ātman*, which is the inmost Self of all. But when the taint caused by attachment and desire is removed, then the *buddhi* becomes clear and serene, like a clean mirror and clear water. Through the pure intellect one realizes *Ātman*." (*Adapted from Śaṅkarāchārya's commentary.*)

In the attainment of Self-Knowledge, the first step is purification of the intellect, and the second, meditation.

*By means of the pure intellect the Self is to be realized within the body.*

### 9

That subtle *Ātman* is to be known by the intellect here in the body where the *prāna* has entered fivefold. By *Ātman* the intellects of men are pervaded, together with the senses. When the intellect is purified, *Ātman* shines forth.

**BY THE INTELLECT:** The intellect when purified by self-control and concentration.

**FIVEFOLD:** The reference is to the five divisions of the *prāna*, known as *prāna*, *apāna*, *vyāna*, *udāna*, and *samāna*. (See p. 90.)

The Self is to be realized in one's own heart. It is manifest there as consciousness, which pervades the intellect and the senses as butter pervades milk. Thus the intellect appears to be endowed with consciousness. When the intellect becomes pure it is able to see *Ātman*. As a matter of fact, the pure intellect is not different from Pure *Ātman*.

*Self-Knowledge is eulogized:*

### 10

Whatever world a man of pure understanding envisages in his mind and whatever desires he cherishes, that world he conquers and those

desires he obtains. Therefore let everyone who wants prosperity worship the man who knows the Self.

WORLD: That is to say, heavenly world.

OF PURE UNDERSTANDING: Endowed with Self-Knowledge.

CHERISHES: Either for himself or for others.

PROSPERITY: Worldly success and happiness.

Since the knower of Brahman becomes Brahman, a prayer to him is a prayer to Brahman Itself.

*Here ends the First Chapter  
of the Third Mundaka.*

## CHAPTER II

HE, THE KNOWER OF THE SELF, knows that Supreme Abode of Brahman, which shines brightly and in which the universe rests. Those wise men who, free from desires, worship such a person transcend the seed of birth.

**FREE FROM DESIRES:** That is to say, free from the desire to acquire material powers and glories.

**PERSON:** The word *purusha* may mean either the Supreme Brahman or the knower of Brahman. According to Non-dualistic Vedānta there is no difference between the two.

**SEED OF BIRTH:** The interminable round of births and deaths in the relative world. Such embodiment is the result of ignorance.

The last verse in the preceding chapter states that by worshipping a knower of the Self a man obtains the fulfilment of his worldly desires. The present verse says that such worship, when free from worldly motive, brings about Liberation.

*The principal discipline of those who seek Liberation is the renunciation of all desires.*

### 2

He who, cherishing objects, desires them, is born again here or there through his desires. But for him whose desires are satisfied and who is established in the Self, all desires vanish even here on earth.

**OBJECTS:** They may belong to this earth or to heaven.

**BORN AGAIN ETC:** According to the doctrine of rebirth, a man's future birth is determined by the intense desires he cherishes in his present life. These desires make him assume a body in an environment where he will have opportunities for their fulfilment.

**DESIRES ARE SATISFIED:** Through the knowledge and realization of Ultimate Truth. The thirst for objects can never be quenched by their enjoyment.

There are two kinds of desires, namely, good and evil. By them are created the righteous and unrighteous tendencies in men. They are responsible for men's rebirth. When all desires are destroyed through Self-Knowledge, a man attains to Brahman and is free from rebirth. But a knower of Brahman, if he so chooses, can assume a body for the service of the world. He is born as a free soul.

*It may be contended that one should study many scriptures in order to realize that Ātman by knowing which one attains the Highest Good. This contention is denied:*

## 3

This Ātman cannot be attained through study of the Vedas, nor through intelligence, nor through much learning. He who chooses Ātman—by him alone is Ātman attained. It is Ātman that reveals to the seeker Its true nature.

**INTELLIGENCE:** By which one comprehends the subtle meaning of the scriptures.

**LEARNING:** The mere hearing of the Vedas.

**HE WHO CHOOSES ETC:** Only if an aspirant seeks to know Ātman with great longing, because he is not different from It, does he realize Ātman. It is the intensity of the longing that removes the veil, whereupon Ātman, which is the self-luminous and eternally existent Reality, reveals Its true nature.

An alternate meaning of the second part of this verse is that Ātman is attained by him alone whom It, Ātman, chooses for the purpose of revealing Its nature. In this interpretation one sees the importance of divine grace for Self-Knowledge. In the regular interpretation the emphasis is on the seeker's effort. But no one, without first making a great effort, receives the divine grace. Gratified by the aspirant's practice of discipline, Brahman removes, as it were, the veil of ajnāna which hides Its true nature. (See *Ka. Up. I. ii. 23.*)

*Inner strength, alertness, and total renunciation are the means of attaining Self-Knowledge.*

## 4

This Ātman cannot be attained by one who is without strength or earnestness or who is without knowledge accompanied by renuncia-



tion. But if a wise man strives by means of these aids, his soul enters the Abode of Brahman.

**STRENGTH:** The strength one acquires through devotion to Ātman, which is the source of all power and knowledge.

**EARNESTNESS:** The mind becomes distracted by attachment to worldly possessions, such as children, wife, house, and money.

**KNOWLEDGE ETC:** Mere intellectual knowledge does not enable a person to realize Brahman. This knowledge must be accompanied by renunciation of all works and their fruit. It is undoubtedly easy for a sannyāsin, who has formally renounced the world, to give up all worldly activities and contemplate Brahman alone. But the mere outer marks of the monastic life are not what the text refers to. There are instances in the Vedas of persons—such as Indra, Janaka, and Gārgi—who did not formally take the vows of a monk and yet attained the Knowledge of Brahman. Complete freedom from ego characterized their lives and action, and that is the real meaning of sannyāsa, or renunciation.

*Absorption in Brahman is described:*

### 5

Having realized Ātman, the seers become satisfied with that Knowledge. Their souls are established in the Supreme Self, they are free from passions, and they are tranquil in mind. Such calm souls, ever devoted to the Self, behold everywhere the omnipresent Brahman and in the end enter into It, which is all this.

**BECOME SATISFIED ETC:** They do not derive satisfaction from the material things of the world.

**EVER DEVOTED ETC:** No happening in the world can distract their minds from Brahman.

**EVERYWHERE:** Within and without: with eyes closed in meditation and with eyes open while engaged in action.

**ENTER INTO IT:** As the water inside a pot immersed in the ocean becomes one with the water of the ocean when the pot is broken, so likewise the ātman of the seer becomes one with Brahman when the body is discarded at the time of death.

Brahman, or Pure Consciousness, alone is real. The idea of individuality associated with the body, the senses, the mind, and the ego is the result of ignorance. So also is the idea of birth, death, and rebirth. From the

standpoint of Brahman, all this is illusory. Self-Knowledge destroys these illusions and one realizes one's true nature. The knower of the Self remains conscious of non-duality, while he is alive, and totally merges in Brahman after death.

*The idea of the preceding verse is reiterated:*

6

Having well ascertained the Self, the goal of the Vedāntic knowledge, and having purified their minds through the practice of sannyāsa, the seers, never relaxing their efforts, enjoy here supreme Immortality and at the time of the great end attain complete freedom in Brahman.

**SANNYĀSA:** Renunciation of all action accompanied by complete devotion to Brahman.

**NEVER RELAXING ETC:** Even knowers of Brahman do not become indifferent about meditation and other spiritual disciplines.

**ENJOY HERE:** On account of the destruction of ignorance and attachment they enjoy freedom even while dwelling on earth. This blessed experience is called jivanmukti, or Liberation in life.

**THE GREAT END:** The death of a free soul is called the great end because he is never again embodied in the relative world. The death of an ordinary man is followed by his rebirth.

The unilluminated soul, after death, either returns to the earth or goes to an upper or a lower world. He moves in a finite plane of existence because he is still subject to ignorance and attached to desires. But the illumined soul is free from māyā, or the limitations imposed by time, space, and causality. He has realized his oneness with Brahman, which transcends time, space, and causality. Brahman is the all-pervading Pure Consciousness, without beginning, without end, immortal, incorporeal, and immutable. Therefore the knower of Brahman, after death, does not go to any particular plane belonging to the relative universe. His death is often compared to the blowing-out of a flame: the total annihilation of the individualized ego. But he does not, by any means, become non-existent, because Brahman is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. The knower of Brahman leaves behind no footprint by which he can be traced. "As a bird flies in the air, as a fish moves in the water, without leaving any trace, so likewise the illumined soul leaves behind no footprint."

*The death of an illumined soul:*

## 7

The fifteen parts go back to their causes, and all the senses to their deities; the actions, and the ātman reflected in the buddhi, become one with the highest imperishable Brahman, which is the Self of all.

**FIFTEEN PARTS:** These are described in the *Praśna Upanishad* (VI. 4.) as faith (śraddhā), space (kham), air (vāyu), fire (jyoti), water (ap), earth (prithivi), the sense-organs (indriyas), the mind (manas), food (annam), vigour (viryam), austerity (tapās), hymns (mantras), sacrifices (karma), the worlds (loka), and the name (nāma). They, with prāna, constitute the puruṣa, or man.

**SENSES ETC:** The sense-organs go back to their cosmic sources. They are produced from the sāttvic parts of the five subtle elements. The organ of hearing is resolved back into subtle ākāśa; the organ of touch into subtle vāyu; the organ of vision, into subtle fire; and so on. Or the text may mean that the psychical forces that control the sense-organs go back to their cosmic counterparts.

**ACTIONS:** The reference is to those actions which have not yet begun to bear fruit. (See pp. 292-293, note on II. ii. 8.)

**ĀTMAN REFLECTED ETC:** The jivātmā, or individual soul, which assumes body after body till the attainment of Liberation, is the reflection of Pure Consciousness in the buddhi. It is like the reflection of the sun in the water in a tray. When the water and the tray are destroyed the reflection merges in the sun. Likewise Ātman (Pure Consciousness), which through avidyā becomes conditioned by the buddhi and then identifies Itself with the body, the senses, and the rest, merges, after the destruction of ignorance, in Pure Consciousness.

**BRAHMAN:** "The Highest, the Immutable, the Infinite, the Imperishable, all-pervading [like the sky], birthless, undecaying, immortal, fearless, without beginning and end, without exterior, the Non-dual, the Good, the Serene, the All." (*Śaṅkarāchārya*.)

The individuality associated with birth, death, and rebirth is the result of ignorance, avidyā. Liberation is the destruction of ignorance. It is like the removal of the cloud, which is followed by the revelation of the sun. Liberation, or Immortality, is not the effect of any action. An effect does not exist before it is produced; but the immortal Brahman always exists.

*The idea of the previous verse is explained by an illustration:*

## 8

As flowing rivers disappear in the sea, losing their names and forms, so a wise man, freed from name and form, attains the Purusha, who is greater than the Great.

**DISAPPEAR ETC:** That is to say, become one with the ocean. They cannot be separated again from the water of the ocean.

**FREED FROM NAME ETC:** Name and form are unreal; they are superimposed on Brahman through ignorance.

**PURUSHA:** Pure Consciousness.

**GREATER THAN THE GREAT:** The word Great refers to Brahman with attributes (Saguna Brahman), which is the highest entity in the relative universe.

*To know Brahman is to become Brahman.*

## 9

He who knows the Supreme Brahman verily becomes Brahman. In his family no one is born ignorant of Brahman. He overcomes grief; he overcomes evil; free from the fetters of the heart, he becomes immortal.

**KNOWS:** That is to say, as one with himself.

**BECOMES BRAHMAN:** He attains to Pure Consciousness. No one, not even the gods, can put an obstacle in his way, because he realizes himself to be the inmost Self of all beings, including the gods.

**GRIEF:** Caused by frustration of desire.

**FETTERS OF THE HEART:** Such as ignorance, desire, anger, and lust.

It is a common experience that in the attainment of a good result many obstacles present themselves. They are created either by physical or cosmic forces or by oneself. But this does not happen in the realization of Brahman, or the Highest Good. The only obstacle in this case is ignorance. When that is removed by Knowledge, the aspirant, who has always been the immortal Brahman, discovers his immortal Self.

*Now the Upanishad concludes by describing the rules regarding the teaching of the Knowledge of Brahman:*

## 10

A Rik-verse declares: This Knowledge of Brahman should be told to those only who have performed the necessary duties, who are versed

in the Vedas and devoted to Brahman, and who, full of faith, have offered oblations in the Ekarshi Fire and performed, according to rule, the rite of carrying fire on the head.

**NECESSARY DUTIES:** By the performance of duties one's heart is purified. Then alone the proper mood is created for cultivating the Knowledge of Brahman.

**VERSED IN THE VEDAS:** The seeker of Self-Knowledge should first possess a thorough knowledge of the Vedas.

**DEVOTED TO BRAHMAN:** Though at the beginning the seeker worships Brahman with attributes, he knows that his ultimate goal is the attainment of the Absolute, or Pure Consciousness.

**FAITH:** The seeker must cherish faith in his spiritual preceptor and in the teachings of the sacred books.

**EKARSHI ETC:** The text mentions the sacrifice known as the Ekarshi and the penance of the Śirovrata, in which one is required to carry fire on one's head. This penance (Śirovrata) is described in the Atharva-Veda. By means of the sacrifice and the penance the aspirant acquires concentration of mind and purity of heart. Afterwards he is able to cultivate the Knowledge of Brahman.

It is often erroneously thought that because Vedānta declares the world to be unreal, it has no room for ethical disciplines, devotional worship, or duties toward others and effaces all distinctions between good and evil. The knower of Brahman, to be sure, sees Brahman alone everywhere and therefore is no longer bound by the injunctions of ethics and religion. Yet he is by no means unethical or irreligious. He cannot participate in any evil or sinful action. It is very important to remember that one cannot attain to the Knowledge of Brahman without practising certain definite spiritual disciplines. They are as follows: The aspirant must study the scriptures (Vedas) and other books auxiliary to them, thus acquiring a thorough scriptural knowledge; he must purify his heart by avoiding selfish and other actions forbidden by the scriptures; he must perform his daily obligatory duties toward his fellow human beings and dumb animals; he must practise austerities and daily devotions; and last of all, he must practise the four specific Vedāntic disciplines. (See p. 114.) These disciplines include all the injunctions of ethics and religion. To a seeker, still under the influence of ignorance, the world and the ego are real, and so also good and evil, virtue and vice, and the other pairs of opposites. Therefore he must discriminate between good and evil and renounce the evil. Ultimately he realizes the world of name and form to be unreal; he sees the non-duality of the self and Brahman and thus goes beyond relativity.

*The Upanishad is completed:*

11

Thus the seer Angiras declared this truth in olden times. A man who has not performed the vow should not read it. Salutation to the great seers! Salutation to the great seers!

ANGIRAS: He taught this knowledge to Śaunaka, who had approached the teacher according to all the scriptural injunctions. (See I. i. 3.)

THIS TRUTH: Regarding the imperishable Brahman.

Vow: This injunction applies to those who belong to the school of the Atharva-Veda. The general idea seems to be that the mind of the seeker must be purified by the performance of religious vows and the practice of the austerities enjoined in the scriptures. The Knowledge of Brahman should not be imparted to an impure person.

SHOULD NOT READ IT: Because the study of the non-dual Brahman can injure those who are not ready for it.

GREAT SEERS: Those who have realized the Supreme Brahman and through whom the Knowledge of Brahman has been transmitted to posterity.

The salutation is repeated in order to show great respect to the teachers of Brahman and also to indicate the completion of the Upanishad.

*Here ends the Second Chapter  
of the Third Mundaka.*

*Here ends the Mundaka Upanishad.*

## THE PEACE CHANT

Om. May we, O gods, hear with our ears what is auspicious! May we, O worshipful gods, see with our eyes what is good! May we, strong in limbs and body, sing your praise and enjoy the life allotted to us by Prajāpati!

Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!

## GLOSSARY



## GLOSSARY

**Advaita** Non-duality; a school of Vedānta philosophy teaching the oneness of God, soul, and universe, whose chief exponent was Śaṅkarācārya.

**Agni** Fire; the god of fire.

**Agnihotra** A Vedic sacrifice in which oblations are offered to Agni.

**ajñāna** A term of Vedānta philosophy meaning ignorance, individual or cosmic. According to Non-dualistic Vedānta it is ajñāna that is responsible for the perception of multiplicity in the relative world, and also for man's bondage and suffering.

**ākāśa** The first of the five material elements that constitute the universe; often translated as "space" and "ether." The four other elements are vāyu (air), agni (fire), ap (water), and prithivi (earth). See p. 58.

**Ānandam** Bliss.

**apāna** A modification of the vital breath, by the action of which the unassimilated food and drink go downward and are ultimately ejected; the movement of the out-going breath.

**Aśvamedha** The Horse-sacrifice, performed in ancient India by kings and emperors to demonstrate their sovereignty over other princes.

**aśvattha** The holy fig tree; sometimes used as a symbol of the universe.

**Ātman** The Self, or Soul; denotes both the Supreme Soul and (with small ā) the individual soul, which, according to Non-dualistic Vedānta, are ultimately identical.

**avidyā** A term of Vedānta philosophy meaning ignorance, individual or cosmic. See ajñāna.

**Bhagavān** (Lit., One endowed with the six attributes, namely, infinite prosperity, strength, glory, splendour, knowledge, and renunciation.) An epithet of the Godhead; also the Personal God of the devotee.

**bhakti** Love of God.

**Brahmā** The Creator God; the First Person of the Hindu Trinity, the other two being Vishnu and Śiva.

**brahmachārin** A celibate student who lives with his teacher and devotes himself to the practice of spiritual discipline.

**brahmacharya** The first of the four stages of life; the life of an unmarried student.

**Brahmaloka** The Plane of *Brahmā*, roughly corresponding to the highest heaven of the dualistic religions, where fortunate souls repair after death and enjoy spiritual communion with the Personal God.

**Brahman** The Absolute; the Supreme Reality of Non-dualistic *Vedānta*.

**Brāhmana** One of the two main sections of the *Vedas*, which also includes the *Āraṇyakas* and the *Upanishads*. See p. 3.

**Brahmavidyā** The Knowledge of Brahman.

**brāhmin** A member of the priestly caste, the highest caste in Hindu society.

**buddhi** The determinative faculty of the mind, which makes decisions; sometimes translated as "intellect."

**Chandraloka** The Plane of the Moon, where souls repair after death to enjoy the fruit of their meritorious deeds done with a selfish motive. Afterwards these souls are reborn on earth.

**Chit** Consciousness.

**cycle** A world period, representing the duration of the universe between its manifestation and its return to the unmanifested state.

**Devaloka** The Plane of the Deities.

**devas** (Lit., shining ones.) The gods of Hindu mythology.

**devatās** Same as *devas*.

**dharma** Righteousness, duty; the inner constitution of a thing, which governs its growth.

**dvija** (Lit., twice-born.) An epithet applied to members of the three upper castes after their investiture with the sacred thread, which is their second, or spiritual birth. The first birth is the physical birth from their mother's womb.

**gandharvas** A class of demigods who are the musicians of heaven.

**Gāyatri** A sacred verse of the *Vedas* recited daily by Hindus of the three upper castes after their investiture with the sacred thread.

**guna** According to *Sāṃkhya* philosophy, *prakṛti* (nature or matter) consists of three *gunas*—usually translated as "qualities"—known as *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. *Tamas* stands for dullness or inertia; *rajas*, for restlessness or activity; *sattva*, for balance or righteousness. They are the three strands forming the twisted rope of nature, by which a man is bound to the relative world.

**guru** Spiritual teacher.

**Hiranyagarbha** (Lit., the Golden Egg.) The first manifestation of *Saguna Brahman* in the relative universe.

**Īśvara** The Personal God. See *Saguna Brahman*.

**jagat** The relative universe.

**jiva** (Lit., living being.) The individual soul, which in essence is one with the Universal Soul.

**jivanmukta** One enjoying Liberation while living in the body.

**jnāna** Knowledge of Reality.

**Jñānakānda** The part of the Vedas that teaches philosophical wisdom.

**karma** Action in general; duty. The Vedas use the word chiefly to denote ritualistic worship and humanitarian action.

**Karmakānda** The part of the Vedas that deals with rituals and sacrifices.

**kshattriya** A member of the warrior caste.

**Maheśvara** (Lit., the Great Lord.) The Lord of all the *Íśvaras*, or Governors, of the innumerable *Brahmāndas*, or world systems; an epithet of *Saguna Brahman*.

**manas** The faculty of doubt and volition; sometimes translated as "mind."

**mantra** Holy Sanskrit text; also (with capital M) one of the two main sections of the Vedas, which describes the hymns used in the sacrifices.

**Nirguna Brahman** (Lit., Brahman without attributes.) A term used to describe the Absolute.

**Om** The most sacred word of the Vedas; also written *Aum*. It is a symbol both of the Personal God and of the Absolute.

**prakṛiti** Primordial nature; the material substratum of the creation, consisting of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*.

**prāna** The vital breath, which sustains life in a physical body; the primal energy or force, of which other physical forces are manifestations. In the books of Yoga, *prāna* is described as having five modifications, according to its five different functions. These are: *prāna* (the vital energy that controls the breath), *apāna* (the vital energy that carries downward unassimilated food and drink), *vyāna* (the vital energy that pervades the entire body), *udāna* (the vital energy by which the contents of the stomach are ejected through the mouth and the soul is conducted from the body at death), and *samāna* (the vital energy that carries nutrition all through the body). The word *Prāna* is also a name of the Cosmic Soul, as endowed with activity.

**Purusha** (Lit., person.) A term of *Sāṃkhya* philosophy denoting Spirit, or the Conscious Principle. The universe evolves from the union of *prakṛiti* (nature) and *Purusha*. In *Vedānta* the word also denotes the Soul and the Absolute.

**rajas** The principle of restlessness or activity. See *guna*.

**rishi** A seer of Truth to whom the wisdom of the Vedas was revealed.

**Sachchidānanda** (Lit., Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.) A name of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality.

**Saguna Brahman** (Lit., Brahman with attributes.) The Absolute conceived of as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the universe. Corresponds to *Īśvara*, or the Personal God.

**Śakti** Power, generally the Creative Power of Brahman; a name of the Divine Mother in the Hindu religion.

**samāna** A modification of the vital breath, by the action of which nutrition is carried all through the body.

**Samhitā** A section of the Vedas containing the collection of hymns used in the sacrifices; same as *Mantra*.

**sannyāsa** The monastic life.

**sannyāsin** A Hindu monk, who renounces the world in order to realize God.

**Sat** Reality, Existence.

**sattva** The principle of balance or righteousness. See *guna*.

**Smṛiti** The sacred books of the Hindus, subsidiary to the Vedas, guiding their daily life and conduct; they include the Epics, the *Purānas*, and the *Code of Manu*.

**Śri** The word is often used as an honorific prefix to the names of deities and eminent persons, or to celebrated works generally of a sacred character.

**Śruti** The Vedas.

**sutra** Aphoristic statement.

**Sutrātmā** (Lit., the Thread Soul.) An epithet of the Cosmic Soul conceived of as the thread that holds together all creatures and the universe; same as *Hiranyagarbha*, *Prāna*, and *Vāyu*.

**tamas** The principle of dullness or inertia. See *guna*.

**Turiya** (Lit., the Fourth.) A name of the Transcendental Brahman, which both transcends and pervades the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep.

**udāna** A modification of the vital breath, by the action of which the contents of the stomach are ejected through the mouth and the soul is conducted from the body at death.

**upādhi** A term of Vedānta philosophy denoting a limitation imposed upon the Self or upon Brahman through ignorance.

- vaiśya** A member of the commercial and agricultural caste.
- Vaiśvānara** Consciousness functioning through the collective gross body in the waking state.
- Vāyu** An epithet of the Cosmic Soul; same as Hiranyagarbha, Prāna, and Sutrātmā.
- vidyā** Knowledge; (with capital V) Knowledge leading to Liberation, i.e. to the Ultimate Reality.
- Virāt** Consciousness limited or conditioned by the upādhi of the aggregate of gross bodies; an epithet of the Cosmic Soul.
- Vishnu** (Lit., the All-pervading Spirit.) A name of the Supreme Lord; the Preserver God, the Second Person of the Hindu Trinity, the other two being Brahmā and Śiva.
- vyāna** A modification of the vital breath, by the action of which the vital energy pervades the entire body.
- yajna** Sacrifice, either in the form of an oblation offered to God or of an action performed with a spiritual motive.
- yoga** Union of the individual soul and the Supreme Soul; the discipline by which such union is effected. The Yoga system of philosophy, ascribed to Patanjali, deals with the realization of Truth through concentration of the mind.
- yogin** One who practises yoga.

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